

THE COWTOWN HUMANIST JULY 2005

TONY HERNANDEZ SPEAKS ON EDUCATING MORE
PRODUCTIVE AND MORE CREATIVE STUDENTS AT
JUNE 8 MEETING

ANN SUTHERLAND TO ADDRESS WORLD POVERTY
AT
JULY 13 MEETING

DOCUMENTARY ON THE PATRIOT ACT AT AUGUST
10
MEETING

HOW TO EDUCATE OPEN-MINDED AND CREATIVE THINKERS

*Why waste time on these trivial things? I don't get it. Teach the student how
to think, give them a scientific project, teach them skills.*

-Fawaziah B. al-Bakr, a Saudi woman and college professor

All who know Saudi Arabia even superficially recognize that the above quotation never made it into a Saudi publication. In fact, it comes from the New York Times. Saudi Arabia probably has about the most stultifying educational system in the world. Its mandate is to uphold the status quo, not to encourage critical thinking. Elementary education is based on the Koran; the secondary and university systems are widely regarded as third-rate. Those who can send their children abroad, mostly to U.S. and U.K. colleges and universities.

No one would compare the U.S. educational system to that of Saudi Arabia. Yet, there is a widespread perception that U.S. schools are not doing their job. International comparisons with other developed countries show U.S. secondary students do not stack up favorably with their counterparts. The U.S. primary and secondary school systems are widely criticized for failing on the basics: high school students are unable to write and/or lack basic math skills and an understanding of science. Biology teachers in many parts of the country are reluctant to discuss Darwinian evolution. Various programs have been undertaken over the years to amend the deficiencies of American educational systems. The "leave no child behind" initiative is only the latest.

Have they addressed the real issues of producing a citizenry able to think critically and creatively? Or are they so intent on turning out students able to do well on standardized tests that real education gets shunted aside? Tony Hernandez spoke on some of these issues at our June 8 meeting. In his view, schools are failing to open up the minds of students. He has the requisite background for recognizing the forces that tend to stifle the development of student potential. Reared in a fundamentalist church, he accepted church dogma as gospel and until he was sixteen he was unable to get beyond what passes as conventional wisdom. An inspired teacher at the Metropolitan State College of Denver opened his eyes to what real education is.

Since then, he has taught at primary schools in Waco, Fort Worth and Burleson. He strives to introduce his students to new ways of thinking, to be receptive to thinking "outside the box." This does not necessarily mean giving up the values and beliefs they bring to the classroom but rather to see issues and problems from a different perspective.

There were twenty-one of us at the June 8 meeting to hear a very engaging talk by a primary school teacher very much engaged in opening the minds of our youngest students. Would that our public school systems had more teachers with his enthusiasm and commitment.

HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

JULY MEETING: This month's meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 13, 7:00 p.m., at Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library Bookstore, 5332 Trail Lake Drive, located in the Wedgworth shopping center just off Wedgmont Circle North. From I-20 take Granbury Road south to Wedgmont Circle. Make a left-turn onto Wedgmont Circle North. You will see a CITGO station on your left. Then turn left again into the Wedgworth shopping center.

JULY SPEAKER: Ann Sutherland, Chief Consultant, Budget and Policy Analysis, United Domestic Workers of America. Ann's professional life has consisted of both teaching and policy analysis. For the last 40 years she has worked on policies for assisting the poor, particularly in the field of education. Her current focus is on comprehensive policies to alleviate the suffering of the world's one billion poor people. This promises to be a very timely discussion, especially in light of this week's Group of Eight meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland where the principal topic of discussion was relieving world poverty, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. It's a topic we should all be focusing on.

PRE-MEETING DINNER: Jason's Deli will again be the location of our pre-meeting dinner. Jason's is located on Overton Ridge Road (near Costco's). Turn right off S. Hulen (going south) and continue a couple of blocks. Jason's will be on your right. Dinner time: 5:30 p.m.

AUGUST PROGRAM: We will watch a video on the Patriot Act at our August 10 meeting.

REMINDERS: Dues are owing since March (if you haven't already paid): \$18 for individual memberships; \$30 for couples; \$24 for individuals receiving the Newsletter by regular mail; \$36 for couples receiving the Newsletter by regular mail.

Please remember to bring a can of food for the needy. Dolores will see that donations get to Westside Unitarian Universalist Church for distribution.

If you have marketable books you no longer need, our host will be happy to accept them.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER: We welcome contributions and criticisms on how to make the Newsletter a better publication as well as more responsive to the needs of our membership. Any suggestions?

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 8 MEETING:

The meeting was called to order by the Chair, Don Ruhs, at the Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library Bookstore.

Don reported that we had received thank you notes from the Friends Bookstore and from Westaid for our contributions.

Don asked the group if there was interest in continuing our "Adopt-a-Street" program with Fort Worth on Granbury Road. He decided there was sufficient interest to contact the city.

Don also noted that the American Humanists Association will mail flyers of our meeting to AHA members living within a 50 mile radius.

Secretary: The minutes of the May 11, 2005 meeting were approved as published in the Newsletter.

Treasurer: Dolores Ruhs gave the treasurer's report. Income for the month was \$30.00. Expenses were \$103.01 for a balance in the treasury of \$787.18.

Future meetings: Don announced the speaker for the July meeting and asked for suggestions for August.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned for the main program.

YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

Chairman: Don Ruhs, 1036 Hill Top Pass, Benbrook, 76126-3848; 817-249-1829; ruhs@sbcglobal.net

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LEGAL FRONT

HOT-BUTTON ISSUES ON SUPREME COURT'S DOCKET

The abortion rights of teenagers, administration efforts to override Oregon's right-to-die law, and the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy are all on the docket for the court's term that begins October 3. Retiring Supreme Court Justice Sandra O'Connor's past opinions show that she would have played a pivotal role in these cases. Now, their resolution may hinge on the views of her successor. Learning those views may prove challenging to senators if a nominee adheres to the practice of not answering questions that are, or soon will be, before the court. Whoever is the nominee, *Roe v. Wade* is in no immediate danger of being overturned. Even if O'Connor were replaced by a conservative opponent of *Roe v. Wade*, *Roe* would still have the support of a five-justice majority. Any challenge to its core holding would take years to bubble up from the lower courts. (WP)

JUSTICES TO TAKE UP ABORTION CASE AGAIN

The Supreme Court announced June 28 that it would take up, for the third time, a long-running dispute between anti-abortion protesters and the National Organization for Women. At issue is whether the protesters can be sued under the federal anti-racketeering law with conspiring to shut down abortion clinics. (LAT)

FLAG-PROTECTION AMENDMENT GOES TO THE SENATE

Having cleared the House, the proposed Constitutional amendment to protect the flag has gone to the Senate to face an uncertain future. A two-thirds majority is required to send it on to the states where approval of 38 is required. The amendment would empower the Congress to legislate regarding the treatment of the flag thus nullifying a Supreme Court decision that struck down on 1st amendment grounds legislation imposing penalties on burning or otherwise desecrating the flag. There have been more than 11,000 attempts in Congress to amend the Constitution since 1789, but only 27 amendments have won ratification. The latest was in 1992, saying pay raises voted by Congress can't take effect until after the next election. Proponents of the amendment hope a larger Republican majority in the Congress and wartime "patriotism" will enhance its chances of passage in the Senate. (AP)

ADDRESSING A NONEXISTENT PROBLEM: HAS CONGRESS NOTHING BETTER TO DO?

Such as amendment would be offensive even if flag burning were a kind of expressive epidemic. But the problem the amendment purports to address is a fiction. When was the last time you saw someone burning a flag? If the answer is never, that's because it hardly ever happens. In fact, one of the few certain consequences of passing this amendment would be to make flag burning a

fashionable form of protest. The other effect would be to water down one of the most profound principles that the Constitution articulates: that Congress shall make no law...abridging freedom of speech. The great power of this principle is that it admits no exceptions: not for the most odious racism or Holocaust denial... Passing this amendment probably wouldn't create a substantive shift in the general scope of the First Amendment's protection, but it would sap it of the idea that gives it its power: that the American government does not punish even the most offensive ideas. Congress does the flag no service with such protection. (WP editorial)

DALLAS JURY POLICY WAS DISCRIMINATORY, COURT RULES

The Supreme Court June 13 reversed the conviction of a black inmate who has been on Texas Death Row for nearly two decades, ruling that Dallas County prosecutors loaded the jury with whites as part of a well-established pattern of keeping minorities off juries. The 6-3 ruling, the latest in a series of reversals of Texas Death Row cases, means that Thomas Miller-El, convicted of killing a motel employee in a 1985 robbery, will most likely get a new trial. (FWST)

CHURCH & STATE

COURT DIVIDED ON TEN COMMANDMENT DISPLAYS

The Supreme Court June 27 ruled that the Ten Commandments can stand on the grounds of the Texas Capitol but are unconstitutional inside two Kentucky courthouses. In Texas, the display stands among dozens of other monuments and markers related to the state's history; in Kentucky, the Commandments were placed among other historical documents chosen for their religious significance. "Simply having religious content or promoting a message consistent with a religious doctrine does not run afoul" of the First Amendment, Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote for the court in the Texas case. Each case was decided on a 5-4 vote, with Justice Stephen Breyer the only Justice to side with the majority in both cases. (FWST)

PUTTING ONE FAITH IN A PREFERRED POSITION

The Texas case involves a more subtle display—the Ten Commandments were one of 17 monuments and 21 historical markers on 22 acres around the Capitol. Justice Steven Breyer, who disapproved of the Kentucky displays, swapped sides in this instance, saying the Texas installation was a border-line case. The Ten Commandments have a religious motivation, he argued, but it was offset in Texas by the other displays, all purporting to embody the ideals of the Texas settlers. Taken together, he said, it suggests an overall secular purpose. That is a stretch. Having the Ten Commandments, but not the holy writings of other

faiths, sends a clear message, as Justice John Paul Stevens notes in dissent, that "this state endorses the divine code of the 'Judeo-Christian God.'" Justice Breyer's real motive may have been pragmatic. If the Texas display is unconstitutional, so are many similar displays nationwide. Ordering them all removed, he wrote could "create the very kind of religiously based divisiveness that the Establishment Clause seeks to avoid." With the religious right clamoring for more religious iconography in public spaces, it is understandable that the court might have shied away from a dramatic ruling that would have heightened what is already a strong antagonism toward the judiciary among some conservative groups. Ceding some ground on Ten Commandment displays may seem like a way to keep the peace. But as our country becomes more religiously diverse, putting one faith in a preferred position is likely to create more religious strife, not less. As with so much else, the founders, who came up with the idea of a clear wall of separation between church and state, had it right. (NYT editorial)

CHRISTIAN GROUPS PLAN MORE MONUMENTS

Within hours of the June 27 Supreme Court decision allowing a Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the Texas Capitol, Christian groups announced a nationwide campaign to install similar displays in 100 cities and towns within a year. "We see this as an historic opportunity, and we're going to pursue it aggressively," said the Rev. Patrick J. Mahoney, director of the Washington-based Christian Defense Coalition, which organized vigils outside the Florida Hospice of Terri Schiavo this year. Mahoney said the Texas decision was sufficient to "open up a whole new frontier for preserving the United States' Christian heritage." Groups on both sides of the issue predicted that the pair of Supreme Court rulings, rather than clarifying a gray area of the law, would spawn more disputes over Ten Commandment displays in parks, town halls and courthouses. They said the displays are now in the front line of a proxy war, standing in for the larger issue of the place of religion in public life. (WP)

BAPTISTS END DISNEY BOYCOTT; FIND TOO ACCEPTING ATTITUDE TOWARD GAYS IN SCHOOLS

Southern Baptists ended an eight-year boycott of the Walt Disney Co. for violating "moral righteousness and traditional family values" in a vote on the final day of the denomination's annual convention Wednesday. Delegates also approved a resolution encouraging parents to determine whether their children's public schools are too accepting of homosexuality.

The boycott was mainly motivated by Disney's providing benefits to companions of gay and lesbian employees. Disney continues to be one of more than 8,200 companies that offer domestic-partner benefits to gay employees. "I think it's

very unfortunate that homophobia is still very much promoted in the Southern Baptist Convention through publications and other means," commented Charles Warford, a retired Southern Baptist pastor. (AP)

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST HEAD BACKS GAY MARRIAGE

The head of the United Church of Christ June 28 publicly endorsed a resolution supporting same-sex marriage. During a speech at Emory University in Atlanta, the Rev. John Thomas said the church's General Synod "should affirm the rights of gay, lesbian and transgender persons" to have marriages "equal in name, privileges and responsibilities to married heterosexual couples." (AP)

CANADIAN HOUSE OF COMMONS CLEARS WAY FOR GAY CIVIL UNIONS

Canada's House of Commons voted June 28 to legalize gay marriage, passing landmark legislation that would grant all same-sex couples in Canada the same legal rights as those in traditional unions between a man and a woman. The bill passed despite opposition from Conservatives and religious leaders. Churches have expressed concern that their clergy would be compelled by law to perform same-sex ceremonies. The legislation, however, covers only civil, not religious, unions and says clergy would not be forced to perform same-sex ceremonies. The Roman Catholic Church, the predominant Christian denomination in Canada, has vigorously opposed the legislation, saying it would harm children in particular. (AP)

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT UNDER ASSAULT IN HOUSE

Republican congressional critics of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) have drafted legislation hedging the government's obligation to protect species on the brink of extinction. Representatives of environmental groups who have seen the draft legislation say that the changes, achieved by redefining the act's interpretation of "conservation", would severely undercut the law. The draft measure, said Jamie Rappoport Clark, the executive vice president of Defenders of Wildlife, "takes a wrecking ball to the whole ESA" by changing its mission, disabling enforcement tools and lessening controls on agencies like the Forestry Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. The draft would automatically take ESA off the books in 2015. It has been credited with playing a major role in preventing the extinction of hundreds of species of plants, animals and birds in the United States. Nonetheless, only a handful of the more than 1,200 species listed over the years have recovered sufficiently to permit their removal from the list. (NYT)

KYOTO TREATY WOULD HAVE WRECKED U.S. ECONOMY?

President Bush said in a Danish TV interview aired June 30 in Copenhagen that adhering to the Kyoto treaty on climate change would have "wrecked" the U.S. economy. Bush noted that the treaty did not include India and China that he called "big polluters." The United States is the world's biggest producer of greenhouse gases, which have been blamed for contributing to global warming. (AP)

BRITISH SCIENTISTS SAY CARBON DIOXIDE TURNING THE OCEANS ACIDIC

Whether or not it contributes to global warming, carbon dioxide is turning the oceans acidic, Britain's leading scientific organization, the Royal Society, warned June 30. The growing acidity would be very likely to harm coral reefs and other marine life by the end of the century. "It will affect all organisms that have skeletons, shells, hard bits that are made of calcium carbonate. The 60-page report was timed to influence the Group of 8 economic summit meeting. Prime Minister Tony Blair, president of the group this year, has been calling for strong action to limit climate change. Unlike forecasts of global warming, which are based on complex and incomplete computer models, the chemistry of carbon dioxide and seawater is simple and straightforward. The burning of fossil fuels by cars and power plants releases more than 25 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide into the air each year. Roughly a third of that is absorbed by the oceans, where the gas undergoes a chemical reaction that produces carbonic acid, which is corrosive to shells. (NYT)

CHALK ANOTHER ONE UP TO THE POLLUTING INDUSTRIES

...any politicians who care about the future economic, environmental and political stability of this country should right now be seeking to end the de facto subsidies for the oil and gas industries and aggressively promote research into new forms of ethanol and biofuel,, limit fuel consumption and tax or cap the carbon emissions created by the burning of fossil fuels, which most scientists believe to be an important cause of global warming. With taxes and market incentives, it would be possible today to encourage the rapid deployment of existing technologies and dramatically reduce this country's dependence on petroleum.

Neither the White House nor congressional leaders nor the Republican Party as a whole has yet accepted this case, perhaps because none has managed to overcome the pressures of the automobile, utility, oil, gas and other lobbies that spend enormous amounts of money trying to protect the status quo. But, despite heavy White House lobbying, a handful of Senate Republicans did break with party orthodoxy last week [June 20-25] on at least one issue. They voted in favor of a "sense of the Senate" resolution that recognizes for the first time

that climate change is a scientific fact, that carbon emissions contribute to climate change and that mandatory controls eventually will have to be deployed.

...But although better than its predecessor, this energy bill is essentially a status quo bill: It still doesn't shift this country as far in the direction of alternative fuels as it should go, and of course it does not dare raise taxes on petroleum use in anyway. Notwithstanding the self-congratulation you will hear if the bill passes, it's nothing to be proud of. (WP editorial)

GREENHOUSE GAS GAMES

Before he went to work at the White House, Philip A. Cooney was a lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute, which opposes mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions. After he left the White House in June, Mr. Cooney said he would go to work for Exxon Mobile Corporation, which opposes mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions. In between, Mr. Cooney's job, as chief of staff for the President's Council on Environmental Quality, included reading and editing scientific reports that assessed the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on climate change. A whistle-blower who has produced documents to back up his claim says Mr. Cooney edited those reports so as to play down that impact—an action that would well make mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions less likely. This administration frequently and angrily denies charges of manipulating scientific evidence to back up its environment and energy policies—including charges that it has challenged the science behind a pending Group of Eight statement on climate change. The president also insists that he cares about global warming. ...But in employing Mr. Cooney, the White House wasn't even paying lip service to the principle of scientific neutrality or to the idea that this issue matters. ...When the president meets G-8 leaders, it won't be surprising if no one pays anything more than lip service to his administration's positions, either. (WP editorial)

TOP OF THE NEWS

ADMINISTRATION'S HOUSING PLAN WOULD HURT POOR, SOME SAY

The Bush administration's proposal to eliminate many of the federal rules requiring public-housing authorities to serve extremely low-income people has generated widespread concern among housing advocates who say the change could prove ruinous for the nation's poorest families who have nowhere else to turn for affordable housing. The proposal, pending in Congress since this spring, would allow local housing authorities to charge higher rents, provide lower subsidies and limit the amount of time tenants can remain in federally subsidized housing to as little as five years. Taken together, the changes would amount to

one of the most dramatic policy shifts in the 68-year history of public housing. (WP)

OHIO EXPANDS SCHOOL VOUCHER PROGRAM

Ohio is more than tripling the size of its school-voucher program, making it the nation's largest since the practice of using public money for private school tuition was found constitutional three years ago. The tuition aid, which has been available only in the Cleveland since 1996, will allow up to 14,000 additional students statewide to leave schools that persistently fail academic tests and move to private schools beginning in the fall of 2006. The state will pay \$4,250 for students in kindergarten through eighth grade and \$5,000 for high schoolers. (AP)

GOVERNMENT SECRECY ON THE RISE

A record 15.6 million documents were classified last year nearly double the number in 2001, according to the federal Information Security Oversight Office. Meanwhile, the declassification process has slowed to a relative crawl, from a high of 204 million pages in 1997 to just 28 million pages last year. The increasing secrecy—and its rising cost to taxpayers estimated by the office at \$7.2 billion last year—is drawing protests even from Republican members of Congress and leaders of the independent commission that studied 9-11. Thomas Kean, chairman of the 9-11 commission, said the failure to prevent the 2001 attacks was rooted not in leaks of sensitive information but in the barriers to sharing information between agencies and with the public. Secrecy has long been denounced by liberal watchdog groups. (NYT)

BUSH PLEDGES \$1.7 BILLION TO FIGHT POVERTY AND DISEASE

President Bush announced a \$1.7 billion aid package for Africa on June 30 and vowed to double total assistance by 2010, unveiling the initiatives in advance of an international summit the of July 6-8 at Gleneagles, Scotland, dedicated to breaking Africa's perpetual cycle of poverty, disease and famine. The bulk of the new aid is targeted at fighting malaria with a goal of cutting in half the death toll of a disease that annually kills more than one million Africans, hitting children the hardest. Bush's initiatives go along with \$674 million in emergency famine relief and an agreement on Africa debt relief. Some analysts and advocates of African aid responded that Bush's lofty language was not fully supported by his numbers, which they said were reached in part by repackaging previous pledges. (WP)

MR. BUSH AND AFRICA

While the sticker price for this initiative is small, the commitment implied from Mr. Bush is even smaller. The president's budget request for 2006 actually cut malaria funding; he will be able to afford the first year of his program only because the Congress insisted on boosting the number. The money required in the next couple of years is modest, because the program's cost comes mainly in 2009 and 2010, and Mr. Bush may try to pay for his promise by skimping on United States payments to the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria—a possibility that the development camp will be rightly watching for in the meanwhile. Mr. Bush promises to spend an extra \$100 million a year on education in Africa and a token \$55 million for women's empowerment.

This is small potatoes next to the \$6 billion in extra aid that Mr. Bush should have pledged if he had wanted the United States to deliver its share of the \$25 billion boost that is next week's G-8 target. It is also insignificant relative to the doubling of United States assistance to Africa that Mr. Bush called for [June 30]. Achieving that doubling is going to depend not on new programs, but realizing the pledges of his first term. The president's HIV-AIDS initiative, announced in 2003, aims to dispense \$15 billion over five years and is firmly on track. But Congress's appropriations for the Millennium Challenge Account, which was supposed to be \$5 billion per year, was only \$1.5 billion in the current fiscal year.

In his speech, Mr. Bush rightly said that aid alone is not the key to Africa's progress, trade liberalization, military peacekeeping and the quality of African leadership are at least as important. But aid remains a useful tool, and the United States ought to do more for the world's poorest continent. (WP editorial)

BOOK CORNER

The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Time. By Jeffrey D. Sachs. Foreword by Bono. 2005.

Ye have the poor with you always.

--Jesus (Mark 14:7)

Let no one be discouraged by the belief there is nothing one man or one woman can do against

the enormous array of the world's ills—against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence.

...Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small

portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

--Robert Kennedy

Before the *Age of Enlightenment*, probably few, if anyone, envisioned an end to poverty: it was widely perceived as a law of nature. Three great Enlightenment icons, however, saw hope in a progressive betterment of man's material conditions. Marie Jean Antoine Condorcet pinned his hopes on education, women's rights and birth control; Adam Smith thought that free trade and the greater division of labor it made possible would lift the great mass of mankind out of misery; Thomas Paine spoke for a leveling of incomes—redistribution from the wealthy to the poor. The Enlightenment's optimism about improving man's material lot has never set well with conservatives. Thomas Malthus posited an iron law in which population always increases at the same rate as the increase in resources brought about by science, technology and their more efficient use.

Jeffrey Sachs in *The End of Poverty* looks to the Marquis de Condorcet and Adam Smith as his lodestars for ending world poverty. The redistribution of resources from rich to poor countries he calls for is presumably a one-time transfer to overcome the stubbornly intractable conditions some of them labor under.

How to get the world's attention to a sustained and massive effort on their behalf is not proving easy. The Irish rock star Bono has been a persistent spokesman for the world's poor to rich country audiences. Lately other media stars have joined in to urge a massive effort to aid poor African countries. Even some icons of the Christian Right are taking notice. The other night Pat Robertson appeared with George Clooney on *Nightline* to advocate a much greater U.S. commitment to alleviating poverty in Africa. George Bush has gotten the message, it seems, since he has recently promised substantially more aid to Africa although not nearly in the amounts that Jeffrey Sachs is calling for. Sadly, the U.S. Congress is again trimming the aid budget. It will take steady pressure from electorates and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to get developed-world governments to live up to their commitments, among other objectives, to halve extreme poverty by 2015 and to end it by 2025.

Without a much better informed public, such pressure on our elected officials is unlikely to materialize. A poll of several months ago showed that the American public overestimates U.S. assistance to needy countries by some twenty-four times. In fact, the U.S. government's aid budget is only about \$15 billion (about what the Department of Defense spends in two days), or just 0.15 percent of our Gross National Product. Assistance would have to increase by almost five-fold to reach the 0.7 percent of GNP that each and every one of the developed countries has promised to the developing world. Unfortunately, the media have been less

than assiduous in disabusing the American public of its misconceptions in this area.

Jeffrey Sachs has been dubbed the most influential economist of our time by no less an authority than the Economist magazine. For a couple of decades he taught many of the world's best and brightest economists at Harvard. Recently he became head of Columbia's Earth Institute and special advisor to Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Millennium Development Goals. He seemingly has traveled almost everywhere and has served as an economic development advisor to governments, international financial institutions and NGOs across the globe. He doesn't mind getting his hands dirty. He has traveled to remote areas of Africa and Asia to see for himself the appalling conditions one sixth of mankind suffers.

To a large extent corrupt and badly functioning bureaucracies account for the inability of economic growth to take hold in broad swaths of the globe. Yet governance is not everything, even though it is the most frequently voiced excuse by many governments, especially our own, to vindicate their own failures to respond to the challenge of ameliorating world poverty. All too familiar is the refrain that in the absence of stable governments, growth-oriented economic policies and legal systems for the protection of property there is little the outside world can do to change things for the better. In some respects, it's a little like the kettle calling the pot black. Developed countries are prone to raising the bar for aid recipients rather higher than is characteristic of their own practice. The IMF in particular has in the past demanded a level of fiscal retrenchment and curtailing of the public sector (even partial privatizing of the educational and health sectors of the economy) that few if any rich countries would ever accept.

Still many once impoverished countries have largely eliminated "extreme" poverty (per capita income of less than a dollar a day) over the past several decades and the two economic "tigers" of the 21st century (China and India) are well on their way to eliminating hunger and to providing basic health services and education. Even Bangladesh, whose prospects at its founding seem so unpromising in 1971 that a senior State Department official described it as an "international basket case", has achieved, despite scoring among the worst in terms of corrupt government, growth rates averaging about five percent a year over the past decade and a halving of the fertility rate with better educational opportunities for females. Sachs attributes the reduction in extreme poverty largely to those countries' capacity for taking advantage of economic globalization. International trade and investment have led to a more economical division of labor and to technology transfers that speed economic transformation. "Liberal" opposition to globalization is, in his view, detrimental to continuing progress toward eliminating world poverty. Moral fervor of the kind displayed at the 1999 founding in Seattle of the World Trade Organization

has its place, particularly in pressuring governments and the corporate sector to adopt policies friendlier to the world environment and to the special requirements of the neediest countries, but not when it attempts to stifle the greater integration of world markets. He cites the example of the pharmaceutical companies that initially tried pricing their AIDS drugs at developed country prices in poor African countries but backed off under public pressure and now price them somewhere closer to the marginal cost of producing them.

Pockets of extreme poverty persist in Latin America, the Middle East and Asia. More than half of those living in extreme poverty (about 1.1 billion people, or one in six of the world population), however, are in sub-Saharan Africa. In the latter prospects of "pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps" are most problematic. He notes that growth in African countries has lagged that of other developing countries with comparable governance by about three percentage points over the past couple of decades. Sachs attributes black Africa's inability to reach "self-sustaining" growth to its geography and its ecology. Its soils are mostly rather poor, its climate is mostly insalubrious, transport systems are difficult to establish, its diseases (the African strain of malaria, for example) are especially difficult to root out, its population is rather scattered; Africa lacks the natural harbors and navigable rivers that enabled other countries to enter the global economy; and, above all, AIDS has proved to be an intractable problem in the absence of sufficient indigenous resources. He calls for a different approach for tackling African poverty, what he calls "clinical" economics, which acknowledges the peculiar features and circumstances of each of sub-Saharan Africa's fifty-odd countries. Some, such as Ghana and Mozambique, have attained a level of governance and development that enable them to digest large infusions of capital for infrastructure—transport, health and education. Others will have to be coaxed along by donor governments and institutions. Some, such as the Congo, although their long-term prospects are favorable, may remain the objects of international peacekeeping efforts and emergency aid for some time to come.

The price tag for eliminating world poverty may seem rather substantial. Sachs estimates it at \$50 billion a year over the next decade. Yet it can be met if the developed countries live up to their commitments. The U.S., he points out, contributed more than one percent of its GNP to the Marshall Plan from 1948 to 1952. That was a much less affluent America. In fact, it wouldn't even be necessary to take back *all* of the tax breaks accruing to the 400 wealthiest Americans from the 2001 tax reductions for the U.S. to make its contribution. Unfortunately, the Bush administration for all of its talk about compassionate conservatism shows scant inclination to accept the gravity of Africa's need. Three billion dollars, most of which is spent on salaries for American experts and on food aid, is a mere drop in the bucket. If we can't be moved by compassion

or by recognition of a special moral debt to Africa (exploitation by the West and Arab lands was particularly egregious), then we had better look to our self-interests. Will we be better off allowing most of the world's second largest continent to fester in disease and violence for decades to come or do we bet on trying to do what is necessary to lift Africa out of a poverty trap?

There is little prospect Sachs' book will reach the Oval Office in the next 3 ½ years. Let's hope the aid bureaucracies and legislatures both here and abroad are more susceptible to an impassioned but reasoned plea to act more effectively for the neediest.

That's it for this month's *Cowtown Humanist!*