

Gingrich Attacks School Busing, Says 'Habits'

By Kevin Merida
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In a free-wheeling discussion with black journalists, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) yesterday offered a series of often provocative opinions on race and racism.

He acknowledged that it would be a lie to tell children that America is colorblind. But he said the failure of poor blacks to achieve was partly the result of their "habits," described blacks as having little entrepreneurial tradition and said the civil rights movement had become more focused on filing grievances than on promoting economic opportunity.

The comments came in a session sponsored by National Minority Politics, a new conservative-oriented magazine based in Houston that some Republicans see as a vehicle to reach

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out to minorities. Republicans in Congress have targeted affirmative action programs for repeal, and Gingrich said the party is interested in finding ways to help people "who are financially and culturally deprived" but is opposed to what he called "genetically based patterns or grievance-based patterns" of assistance.

But he also suggested that with the heavy schedule of legislation, proposals to revamp affirmative action may not reach the House floor before this Congress adjourns.

More children, Gingrich said, would have been able to "break out" of pov-

erty if the nation had taken the money it has spent on school busing over the last 30 years and poured it into "intensive education" in neighborhood schools. Asked if he was advocating a return to the separate-but-equal model of public schools before the Supreme Court outlawed school segregation in 1954, Gingrich replied: "I'm saying you have separate schools now."

He said that as black and white middle-class families have fled the cities, they have left in their wake segregated public school systems that are overwhelmingly minority. "This is not about integration versus segregation," he said. "This is about achievement vs. non-achievement." Gingrich stopped short of calling for a halt to school busing, saying instead "it should be questioned."

Gingrich said the objectives of the civil rights movement had been mistaken because it was dominated by lawyers, ministers, political activists and others "who thought there was some way to get fairness of outcome as opposed to equality of opportunity."

He acknowledged that it was more "difficult to acquire wealth as a black

Keep Blacks Poor

in America," but added that more than skin color is at play. "The truth is that preachers and lawyers have been more dominant in the black culture in the last 40 years than have business people," said Gingrich. "The habits of the church and the habits of the lawsuit have been more powerful than the habits of acquisition and the habits of job creation."

He said blacks could open up their own businesses with "very tiny capital investments," and he rejected complaints by some minority business owners that they need federal assistance because they have trouble getting loans and breaking into some markets.

"You know what my weakness is? I'm a historian," Gingrich said, citing the examples of Jews, Italians and the

Irish, whom he said had similar difficulties getting started but overcame them.

"He's a weak historian," Roger Wilkins, a professor of history at George Mason University, said in response to the comparison, which he described as "either bigoted, stupid, duplicitous or a combination of all three."

Blacks, Wilkins said, were excluded from access to capital and to the political system that aided other immigrant groups.

Wilkins said on the one hand Gingrich says he's for providing opportunities for blacks, but on the other hand he appears to blame them for their own problems. "The thing that has hurt black people more than anything else is fundamental racism," said Wilkins. "There is virtually no one in this

country I know of who hasn't been injured because of their blackness."

Asked what he would tell a black child who grew up with the notion of the United States as a colorblind nation, Gingrich said he'd respond: "We're not colorblind. I'd say it's a lie to walk into a school in America and say, 'This is a colorblind society.' And we shouldn't lie to children."

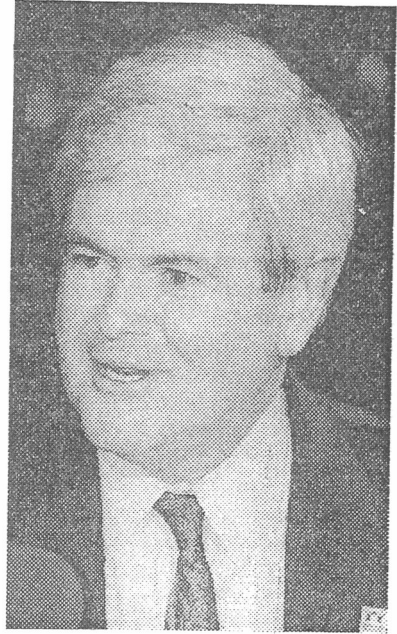
Pressed on what he would tell children who wondered what their opportunities were, Gingrich said his answer would be: "If you're black you have to work harder, and if you're black and poor you have to work twice as hard."

Gingrich, who has been intimately involved in District affairs, also was asked to respond to the suspicions of some residents that Republican inter-

est in the city is part of a "conspiracy to boot out the black-run government" and "roust out" poor blacks.

"I understand the fear," he said. "What I want to do is transform Anacostia so the people currently living there are able to participate in the transformation so that five or 10 years from now they have new habits. Let me be very clear about this: I'm prepared to say to the poor, 'You have to learn new habits. The habits of being poor don't work. So yes, you've got to change.'"

For his part, he said, he was willing to take three or four neighborhoods in the country and use federal money for several "pilot projects," including giving families \$6,000 and a laptop computer for each child who enters first grade able to read.



REP. NEWT GINGRICH

... Americans are "not colorblind"