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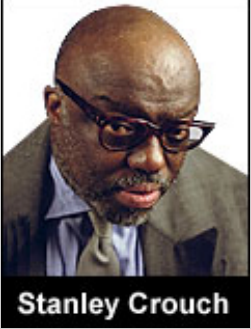
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Stanley Crouch

Stanley Crouch is a columnist, novelist, essayist, critic and television commentator. He has served since 1987 as an artistic consultant at Lincoln Center and is a co-founder of the department known as Jazz at Lincoln Center. In 1993, he received both the Jean Stein Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a MacArthur Foundation grant. He is now working on a biography of Charlie Parker.

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How Latinos will change U.S. politics

There was an important conference in our town last week called "People and Politics in America's Big Cities" organized by Stephen Greenwald and Hakim Hasan of Metropolitan College, Fernando Ferrer of the Drum Major Institute and the Century Foundation. The subject was an examination of what will happen, or could happen, or should happen, as America's population continues to change and more people who are not white - especially Latinos - change the discussion of race and ethnicity from white and black to white, brown, black and Asian or whatever else.

What will all this mean to our cities and nation? Will we have to move over, as some think, so that some Johnny-come-latelies into our cities are given the reins of power merely because they have entered the country, whether legally or illegally? Will their commitment be to this country or to those nations from which they come?

This discussion has had a big impact on California, where the rising Latin population has inspired a good amount of dread, perhaps because the increasing numbers may result in ethnic blocs that are no more interested in sharing power than whites were when they held all the cards. Perhaps whites will not only become a minority, but suffer the rage of those who feel they have the power to reverse circumstances and put down some payback.

Dennis Archer, a former mayor of Detroit, thinks the last option could become the angry future if whites fail to understand how important it is to begin to trust others and prove their faith in our nation by standing up against all paranoia. Archer believes the affirmative-action case now being decided by the Supreme Court is the most important civil rights case since Brown vs. Board of

Education, which began the breaking down of legalized segregation. Archer warned that if the Supreme Court rules against affirmative action, the grandchildren of the white people now in charge could face the repercussions of a brown majority that will not forget what happened to it at this important moment.

I don't believe that is the issue. The issue, from the standpoint of the civil rights establishment, is that the arguments about slavery and the long tradition of racism and exclusion of blacks will not obtain when Latinos and Asians have power. They will be able to argue that they neither brought slaves to this land nor were in control of the systematic racism that followed. In short, the civil rights establishment will have to come up with a new game plan.

Besides, if the public school system is overhauled and becomes effective, people will be able to compete far more impressively and the traditional claims will no longer have the power they have had.

As the various speakers acknowledged, we have to embrace our collective humanity and build coalitions around issues, not categories. We have to see where we're going, and we have to make sure all of us go there - and that there is no segregated seating.

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