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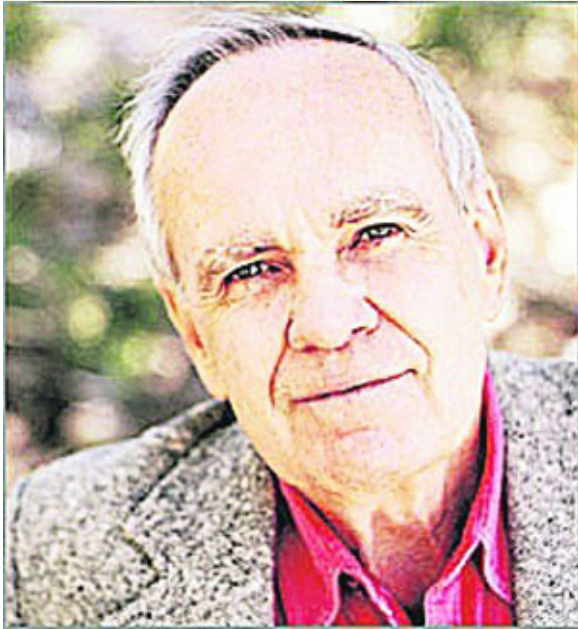
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Has Our Country Finally Become Colorblind? A Commonwealth Club Presentation

By *Sophie Braccini*



Leon Litwack Photo provided

As our nation prepares to inaugurate its first African-American President, some Americans wonder if our country can truly become colorblind. At its core, the story of America is the constant redefining of the ideas most central to the Constitution: Liberty, freedom and equality. How will Obama's victory shape American history? How far have we come as a result of this past election, and how much farther do we still need to go? Three Bay Area professors will debate these questions on Thursday, January 15, at the Veterans Hall, 3780 Mount Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette. The event is titled: Problems with Progress: a Historical Perspective on the Presidency.

"I don't think our country has evolved enough," says Leon Litwack, Pulitzer Prize Winner and Professor Emeritus of American History at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). "Racism is very much a part of our country, the election is an important step but we can't know yet if the symbolic impact of the election will be strong enough; we still have a long way to go." Litwack believes that something a black preacher in the 70's said about the impact of the civil right movement is still valid: 'Everything has changed and nothing has changed,' "and that's where we are now," adds Litwack.

Litwack is the 1980 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for history for his book "Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery." He retired from UCB at the end of the spring 2007 semester. From 1964 to 2007, Litwack taught more than 30,000 at UCB. For much of that time, he taught the introductory course in post-Civil War American History, and was the Alexander F. and May T. Morrison Professor of American History. In addition to the Pulitzer Prize in History, he has received many honors in recognition of his distinguished and path-breaking

scholarship, including the Francis Parkman Prize, the American Book Award, and election to the presidency of the Organization of American Historians. Litwack has also been an enormously popular and influential teacher. He was profiled in Newsweek's 2006 edition of the "Giving Back Awards," having been nominated by one of his former students. He has received two distinguished teaching awards. Litwack was also presented with the Golden Apple Award for Outstanding Teaching in 2007 by the Associated Students of the University of California.

Richard Thompson Ford, the George E. Osborne Professor of Law at Stanford Law School, will present with Litwack. An expert on civil rights and anti-discrimination law, Richard Thompson Ford has distinguished himself as an insightful voice and compelling writer on questions of race and multiculturalism. His work has focused on the social and legal conflicts surrounding claims of discrimination, on the causes and effects of racial segregation, and on the use of territorial boundaries as instruments of social regulation. His book "THE RACE CARD: How Bluffing About Bias Makes Race Relations Worse," a sharp, tightly argued and delightfully contentious work, Richard Thompson Ford vivisected every sacred cow in "post-racist" America.

James Taylor, Associate Professor of Politics at the University of San Francisco, will be the third participant in the panel. Taylor is the president-elect of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Southern California. His dissertation was on contemporary Black politics and political involvement as reflected in the Million Man March, in which he personally participated. Most recently, Professor Taylor contributed a chapter to Barbara McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola's Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously (Baylor, 2005). He has also written a chapter for the book, Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Politics (2002), and contributed an essay to the 2002 Report on Violence in San Francisco, published by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, and focused in particular on the causes and impact of violence on communities of color. Taylor has served as a Task Force member for the "Slavery Disclosure Ordinance," sponsored by San Francisco County and City Supervisor Sophie Maxwell. He is working on a book titled "Sons of Thunder: Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan & The Haunting of America."

The California Historical Society co-organized the evening. Tickets are \$12 for members, \$18 for non-members, \$7 for students. For tickets, visit commonwealthclub.org or call (415) 597-6705.

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