

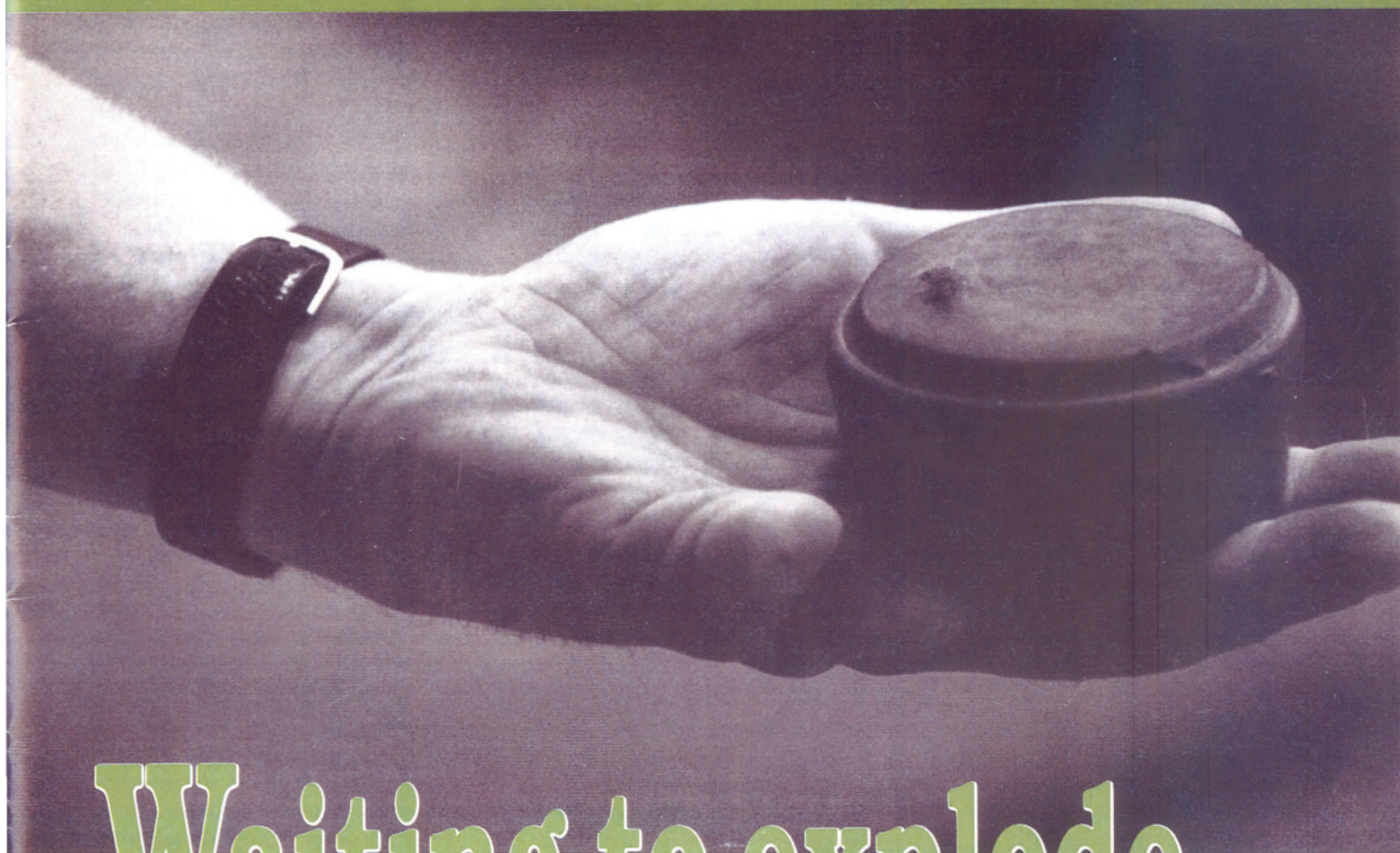
TASLIMA NASRIN ON ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

THE
HUMANIST

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THE POPULAR CONDITION

The Jack Nicklaus Syndrome

There is no doubt that Jack Nicklaus is one of the greatest golfers—if not the greatest golfer—who ever played the sport. He has also been a strong proponent for integrating golf. He has ownerships in many country clubs and has designed golf courses with the understanding that each establishment must be integrated. He is, indeed, a great ambassador of the liberal cause.

Unfortunately, he also displays a racist attitude shared by many white liberals in this country. This attitude can be called the "Jack Nicklaus syndrome" because Nicklaus illustrated it so clearly in July 1994. He said that the reason there are not more African-American golfers playing at the highest level in the sport is because blacks have "different muscles that react in different ways."

Nicklaus clearly wants everything to be fair, decent, and honest in our society, but he also harbors a racist attitude that is poorly understood and often unrecognized by much of white society—in particular, white liberals. It masks the fact that African-Americans are faced with a lack of equal opportunity that is caused in part by precisely those members of society who want to do the most to promote integration. Although discrimination is not the intention of Nicklaus and others like him, their attitude, which is blind to the less blatant forms of racism, promotes further polarization of the races.

Shortly after Nicklaus made his now-famous statement, Tiger Woods won the National Amateur Golf Tournament on August 28, 1994. Woods was the first African-American golfer—and, at age 18, the youngest participant ever—to win this prestigious tournament. One could argue that Nicklaus is still right: one black star or only a few black stars (if the few black professional golfers are included) does not mean that African-Americans have the correct

muscle coordination for the sport. This argument, however, misses the point and is in itself racist because there would be more African-Americans playing at the highest level of golf if black youths were given an equal opportunity to take it up and therefore *develop the correct muscle coordination*. What Nicklaus and so many other whites fail to comprehend is that a lack of appropriate muscle coordination among African-Americans for playing golf—if this is really a factor—is itself the result of racism.

Another example of the Jack Nicklaus syndrome was a statement made by Roger Bannister. Dr. Bannister, who is English and was the first person to break the four-minute mile, said that black sprinters may have "certain natural anatomical advantages" that give them an edge in track. Although Dr. Bannister recognizes that this is a sensitive issue, he could have exercised greater sensitivity by not making this statement at all. In fairness to Dr. Bannister, he also said that "the brain, not the heart or lungs, is the critical organ" in determining achievement. This latter statement emphasizes how so very important desire and commitment are to accomplishment.

An extremely racist slur which is a more blatant example of the Jack Nicklaus syndrome is a comment made by Al Campanis on ABC's "Nightline" on April 7, 1987. Campanis was at that time general manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team. He said that blacks "may not have some of the necessities to be, let's say, a field manager, or perhaps a general manager." Campanis lost his job for this comment, as well he should have.

Interestingly, many baseball players—both black and white—came to the defense of Campanis with numerous examples of how his support helped

African-Americans succeed in this sport. Indeed, Campanis did not show any prejudice nor did he see any color on the baseball field. He wanted the best player at each position regardless of race. Thus, it is easy to see how he was regarded as a "great white liberal." However, it must also be recognized that in Campanis' way of thinking, once off the field, there *was* a distinction between the races: African-Americans could not perform in executive positions because blacks, even though they excelled on the field, lacked "some of the necessities" that are required to excel as a manager. This attitude prevents African-Americans from succeeding in numerous facets of society and particularly in upper corporate positions.

Had Campanis not made this statement on national television, he probably would always have been considered a good white liberal and a strong proponent of integration in baseball. Furthermore, he would never have been held accountable for the poor representation of African Americans in managerial and executive positions in this sport. His remarks, as painful as they were, served a useful purpose: they provided a clear illustration of some of the blatantly racist reasons why African Americans were not being hired into higher positions in baseball.

Although there is still much to be done to achieve equality, Campanis' remarks resulted in team owners hiring more African-Americans into management positions. In addition, they had the very important effect of demonstrating some of the ill-defined thinking processes among white liberals that result in blatant racism. It should be noted that Campanis must be regarded as a liberal because he supported complete equality on the playing field: most certainly, he saw himself as a person who strongly supported the equality of

humankind. He did not envision himself as a racist, nor did many others in baseball see him as a racist, as was demonstrated by the strong support he received from both black and white players when he was fired. However, the dichotomy that exists in Campanis' thinking—a dichotomy to which Campanis himself was blind—promotes racism and contributes to further polarization between the races.

When whites marvel at the extraordinary accomplishments that African-Americans have made in every field that has been open to them, they should also remember that it is indeed "the brain, not the heart and lungs," which is "the critical organ" behind every achievement, and that tremendous desire and commitment accompany each success story. There is absolutely no need—and it is absolutely racist, to boot—to at-

tribute these many varied accomplishments to "certain natural anatomical advantages."

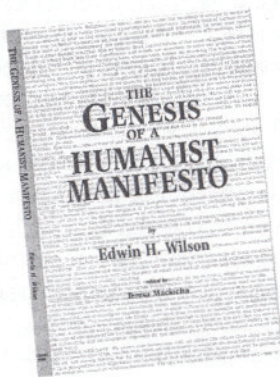
Since African-Americans have excelled in all fields which are open to them, aren't they going to excel in every area of society if given equal opportunity? The answer, based on past accomplishment, is a resounding yes. The key for this to transpire is *equal opportunity*.

Americans should be mindful of the racist attitude embodied in the Jack Nicklaus syndrome, for changing it would bring America closer to achieving equal opportunity and result in more African-American participation in the mainstream of society. Furthermore, recognition and alteration of this attitude can help carry this country into the twenty-first century as a more powerful, more responsible, more compassionate, and wiser nation. This can be ac-

complished so much more easily because of African American input at every level. All Americans should recognize the great potential for tenacity, intellectualism, and creativity that is being lost by excluding African-Americans through racist attitudes. America as a whole gains when all of its resources—and, in particular, the tremendous resources offered by African-American society—are utilized to their fullest. H

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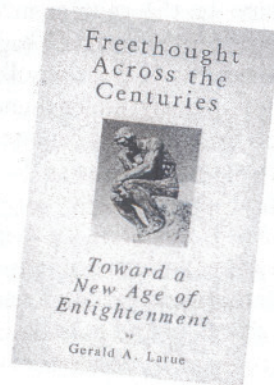


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