



Along the Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable

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A Strategy for the Rainbow Coalition

Part II of a Two Part Series

Throughout Black America, progressive leaders and activists—political organizers, social workers, community mobilizers—are debating one fundamental question: Where is Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition going, and what should be our strategy for 1988?

The political strategies advanced to date fall into three categories. The smallest and least significant group adheres to an "anti-Rainbow" posture. Some of these activists have been burned by Jesse in the past, during his Operation PUSH stage, and they still don't trust the "Country Preacher's" judgement and motives. They argue that the Rainbow mobilization is taking place inside the Democratic Party, which is still dominated by white, corporate interests. Thus we should steer clear of Jackson. This is the purist approach which permits some Black radicals to take a stance strictly in line with their ideology. But it is also a position which will isolate us from the majority of Black working people and the poor.

Others in this trend advocate an "abstentionist position"—that instead of committing ourselves to another national presidential campaign, we should instead be working in local progressive struggles outside of the electoral process. This approach, which implicitly rejects the electoral arena as a relevant or appropriate place for progressive activities, could be favored by some who are heavily involved in local social welfare work, and also in some Black nationalist organizations which have never fully trusted Jackson. But few Blacks will take these arguments seriously, since the net result would be almost identical to casting our support to the Republicans. We would throw away an effective tool to reach and mobilize millions of people.

A second group of Black "realists" and pragmatists also condemns Jackson and the Rainbow, but for very different reasons. These big city mayors like Coleman Young of Detroit and Andrew Young of Atlanta argue that Jackson will never win; therefore, Blacks must support a white liberal or even a moderate centrist who shares some of our beliefs, because he will be able to win the general election. So these apologists for Gephardt and Biden, Simon and maybe even Sam Nunn will advocate not just a "lesser-evil" political position,

but an odious political ploy which has us capitulating even before the electorate even has a chance to select a presidential nominee! Many Black elected officials and most of the leadership of national civil rights organizations will be inclined to favor essentially this "realistic" response to the 1988 race, because all want to obtain political IOUs with the eventual Democratic party nominee. Their central dilemma is that Jackson's candidacy is endorsed by an overwhelming majority of their own constituents, so that any public equivocation or any waffling on Jesse undermines their own marginal legitimacy vis a vis the Black electorate.

The third group, which represents the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of Black Americans, rejects the first two arguments. But we are obliged to point out the benefits, as well as risks, inherent in the Rainbow strategy of working inside the Democratic presidential primaries. One major plus to the electoral effort is that thousands of farmers, the unemployed, working people, the elderly, women, and people of color who have never participated in the politics of social change will become energized and involved. This means that thousands of new activists will be trained, and most will continue their progressive involvement in local affairs long after the 1988 campaign.

Although Jackson's lieutenants still insist that Jesse can win the Democratic presidential nomination, I think we have to be honest with our constituents, who could one day feel betrayed or disillusioned at the Atlanta convention. A Rainbow campaign is absolutely necessary to deepen fundamental social reforms inside the U.S.—but we should take part in this effort while recognizing that Jackson personally will never be elected. The Democratic party's leadership is prepared to do everything to destroy Jackson's campaign if it climbs above the 20 percent popularity rating in national polls. The Democrats would rather lose the 1988 presidential election to Dole, Bush, Kemp, etc., if the only way they could win would be to adopt the Rainbow's entire policy agenda and accept Jesse as their candidate. What the Jackson campaign is really about is a struggle over the very nature, ideological direction and future of the Democratic Party.

Educational Genocide: Disappearing Black College Students

Growing statistical evidence indicates that a type of educational genocide is occurring against Black college students across the country. An examination of recent data illustrates that the gap between the educational opportunities between whites and Blacks has widened severely in the 1980s.

Superficially, it appeared to many observers at first that the educational gains achieved by Black Americans during the desegregation movement of the 1960s had continued into more recent years. For instance, the proportion of high school dropouts for Black youth aged 16 to 19 actually fell from 22 percent in 1970 to 12 percent in 1983. Conversely, Black enrollment in universities, junior colleges, and in professional schools soared. In 1970, only about one in eight Afro-American over the age of 25 had finished college. Thirteen years later, Black college enrollment had doubled reaching 1.1 million. Blacks amounted to one tenth of the total American collegiate population, according to the Bureau of the Census. Many Black students were the beneficiaries of affirmative action recruitment programs, which broke down some of the traditional Jim Crow barriers which kept earlier generations of qualified Blacks out of elite, white institutions. But Blacks who gained admission to such colleges were generally well prepared academically. Indeed, the gap between white and Black college entrance examination scores narrowed by more than 40 points since the mid-1970s.

However, these educational improvements partially masked other more negative trends, which were not fully appreciated until the mid-1980s. In previous years, the cost of a college education did not generally keep pace with the rate of inflation, which had the effect of reducing the real costs of college for some working class families. But during the Reagan administration, tuition and fees have been much higher than inflation, and the requirements for federal financial assistance have been severely constricted. Grants formerly comprised over two-thirds of all tuition costs for the average Black student. By the mid-1980s, the vast majority of aid was represented in the form of loans not grants, and the total amount of money given was sharply reduced.

Since most Blacks' family incomes failed to keep pace with inflation, the amount of discretionary income which could be saved for an education also declined. Working-class households earning \$15,000 to \$25,000 annually could scarcely afford to pay even one third of the tuition, room and board at most private and many public colleges. Thus between 1980 and 1984, the total number of Black youth in four-year colleges dropped by 3.3 percent, down to 613,000 students. The total percentage of students between the ages of 18 to 24 enrolled in college between 1975 and 1985 rose for whites, 26.9 percent to 28.7 percent; but the percentage fell for Blacks, 20.7 percent down to 19.8 percent. Another

effective method of viewing the problem is by focusing on the percentage of all high school students who went directly to colleges. For whites, the college matriculation rate was 51 percent in 1977, and increased to 59 percent by 1984. During the same years, the rate of Black high school students going directly to colleges plummeted, from 50 percent down to 42 percent. In short, Blacks are graduating from high school in record numbers—but proportionately fewer of them are enrolling into colleges.

The plight of the "disappearing Black student" is particularly critical in graduate and professional level studies. In 1972, there were 21,000 full-time Black graduate students. By 1984, the figure had declined to only 18,000 students. This trend was especially apparent in Southern states, where the implementation of college desegregation efforts has lagged under the Reagan administration. According to the research of Black educators William Trent and Elaine J. Copeland, the number of Black graduate students enrolled in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Virginia, Georgia and Florida combined fell from 1,783 in 1976 to 1,345 in 1982. First-time graduate enrollments for Blacks also declined from 1,218 in 1978 down to 757 six years later.

Nationwide, Black enrollments at all graduate schools declined by approximately one eighth since 1980. Black enrollments in management and business schools dropped from 7,511 students in 1980 to 7,330 in 1984, barely 3.6 percent of all business students. Despite increases in Blacks' test scores for medical school admissions, the percentage of Black medical students has also dropped since 1984. In a few fields, Afro-American doctoral students remain virtually nonexistent. For instance, in 1986 only eleven Blacks were granted doctoral degrees in engineering. The total number of Blacks obtaining doctorates in computer science last year was three.

What are the implications of this systemic destruction of Black higher educational opportunity? Colleges and professional schools are the prime institutions of socioeconomic upward mobility for millions of Americans—Black, Hispanic and white. By partially closing these avenues for training, the size of the potential Black middle class will be severely limited. Since the middle class has traditionally produced the leadership of Black America in electoral politics, economics, the clergy, education and the arts, the ability of this strata to reproduce itself is curtailed. Thus one central racial tenet of Reaganism, which is to move Black America backward to its subordinate status of the Plessy vs. Ferguson era, is well served through this process of "educational genocide." By curtailing the education of our potential leaders, the Black Freedom Movement will be crippled in the future. Only by defeating Reaganism at the polls next year, and by mobilizing to expand federal aid programs for educational opportunity, can these trends be reversed.

South Africa: Whither U.S. Policy?

The Rev. Leon Sullivan's recent call for U.S. firms to sever all business ties with South Africa focuses renewed attention on the deteriorating situation in that strife-torn land. It also illustrates the growing frustration among anti-apartheid activists in this country at the absence of a coherent U.S. policy regarding South Africa.

Since Congress voted to override the President's veto on sanctions, the Reagan Administration has virtually washed its hands of South Africa. And while it must be acknowledged that the U.S. has limited leverage in a nation as powerful as South Africa, the Administration's do-nothingness has only served to strengthen the hand of the repressive regime in Pretoria.

Recent developments do not bode well for South Africa's oppressed Black majority. National elections in May gave President Botha's ruling National Party a resounding victory, seriously weakened the liberal opposition, and increased conservative and right-wing representation in the whites-only Parliament. The year-old state of emergency, which has kept thousands of activists underground or in jail, has virtually vitiated organized, grassroots political opposition. Black trade unions, the best organized and potent vehicles for change, report increased government efforts to undercut and depoliticize their activities.

On the economic front, the void left by the withdrawal of numerous Western companies is being filled by businesses from Israel, South Korea, Taiwan and other Asian countries. Recent reports indicate that many of these companies—not bound by the Sullivan Principles to better train, promote and care for Black workers—exploit South Africa's reserve of cheap labor and give nothing back to the community in terms of social and educational programs.

Moreover, the imposition of U.S. sanctions appears to have dampened anti-apartheid activism in this country. This prevailing inertia seems to stem from the assumption that nothing more can be done and the demoralizing impact of Botha's election-day triumph.

But, as Rev. Sullivan suggests, much more needs to be done, now more than ever. As the standard-bearer of democracy in the world, the United States must be at the forefront of an international effort to chastise, ostracize and criticize the loathsome apartheid regime. The U.S. must be willing to commit millions of dollars to help grass-roots, community organizations in South Africa working for democratic change, and those providing essential healthcare, legal, and educational services to the victims of apartheid. In addition to direct aid, the Administration must openly use its influence to persuade its allies in Europe, the Mideast, and Asia to take a tougher stand against Pretoria. Any U.S. initiatives will be ineffective if other nations continue business as usual with South Africa.

Without a coherent and coordinated international effort, the already grim situation in South Africa will only get grimmer. Without U.S. leadership, however, there cannot be any coordinated and meaningful strategy. It is essential, therefore, for all Americans concerned about the brutal subjugation of South Africa's Black majority to make it clear to Congressional, Senate and other leaders that a cogent U.S. policy vis-a-vis South Africa must be an integral part of any U.S. foreign policy agenda. And as candidates line up for the 1988 Presidential elections, the American people must make it clear that the situation in South Africa remains a high priority issue.

Norman Hill is President of the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

Letters to the Editor

Black Man Should be Recognized for Historical Contribution to Northwest

In your recent article [June 24, 1987, "Pieces of a Dream"] in the Portland Observer, I read of the Black man's problem with the newer generations of children and the insensitivity of the white man to racism. I, as a white man born in Wisconsin and raised in the north of Oregon as a youth, never knew or even thought about racism. I also came from a broken family home and lived in foster homes.

I didn't have a role model of male gender as you speak of some young Black children. I would say my role models were teachers and coaches. I did not try to disrupt classes in school by talking and running around in class. I was not prejudice toward any Black until high school at Roosevelt High in Portland. I do not mean all Blacks; I am talking of the small groups who roamed the halls intimidating whites with much lack of consideration of others' rights; boys and girls alike. You learned me to be prejudiced by your actions.

It's a tragedy that Blacks that have consideration for whites and other races have to weather the same storm of periodic outward racism directed to so few. Blacks are 11% of the population, yet the prisons are majority Black. The Chinese and Japanese are a smaller minority. Why are so many of them not in prison.

The attitude of "Get Mine", "Get Yours", and "Get Ours" reeks of racism.

The incident of Mr. Goetz on the subway was of a man frightened from previous muggings to strike out at them that threaten harm to him. They could have been any color, and we know the so-called children victims

didn't even have their screwdrivers sharpened. We can overlook the exuberant children as they were just jivin' him, or were they testing him for his resistance to jivin'. I'm trying to be honest with you in this letter, but as I'm not in my prime anymore, I am armed whenever I'm in Portland. I do it as a deterrent. I am not pistol-waving Honky Redneck.

I consider a firearm a tool to be used only when needed, similar to a life preserver on a boat. One will possible help you from being a plaything of persons like the Crips, the other can possibly save you from drowning, though the drowning is permanent without residue pain. The other alternative could be with you a life time. We all should look to the words, "Consideration of others". This includes children and adults. We have enough trouble surviving in this world without preaching more violence and racism to children.

I, therefore, submit this article ["Black Saul Held Off the British at Cape D", see Page 8] that was published in our local newspaper. It should make a Black person proud, children and adults, of this one Black man that made history in the Northwest. I was first surprised, astounded and later proud to know he considered himself an American first and still jived a honky without being dishonest. He was respected because he was American, not because he was African-American. The man should have more recognition in our Northwest history. A researched history of him would be of great value to Black Studies. Thank You.

Joe F. Kolaski
Seaview, WA

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