

EDITORIAL / OPINION



Harold Washington
1922 - 1987

"We Shall Overcome"

Harold won against the odds. He died of an enlarged heart, not a broken heart. It was enlarged by three, because he had to have a big heart to make room for all of Chicago.

Jesse Jackson



Along the Color Line

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

Dr. Manning Marable is Chairperson of the Black Studies Department, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 140 newspapers internationally.

Black Politicians and the Pursuit of Power

Black politicians are rapidly reaching something of an ideological and strategic deadend all over the country. Last month's elections were widely interpreted as a general success story for Blacks running for public office. Philadelphia mayor Wilson Goode narrowly defeated rightwing Republican Frank Rizzo. Kurt Schmoke, a 37-year-old Democrat who serves as Baltimore's chief prosecutor, became the first popularly elected Black mayor of the city. And in Hartford, Connecticut, Carrie Saxon Perry became the first Black woman to be elected mayor of a major New England city. But despite these and other gains, there are other indications that a deep crisis in the future direction of Black politics is in the making.

Several distinct lessons can be drawn from the recent elections. First, it remains evident that white American voters are far more "race conscious" in their evaluation and selection of candidates for public office than Black or Latino voters are. This might surprise whites who assume that the fundamental reason for Jesse Jackson's popularity among the masses of white voters is due to the "Country Preacher's" racial identity. This is not true. Black voters overwhelmingly endorse Jackson because he is the only presidential candidate who is elevating policy issues which objectively advance the material, social and political interests of the Black community. The same cannot be said of the majority of white voters, unfortunately, who continue to vote for conservative candidates who are at odds with their own interests.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, Black Democrat Harvey Gantt was elected mayor several years ago by building a coalition of Blacks and middle income whites. Gantt never succeeded in winning the electoral support of the majority of white voters, but he still tended to minimize any discussion of policy issues which raised the question of race. When challenged this fall by Sue Myrick, a white Republican advertising executive who criticized the mayor on urban traffic issues, Gantt perhaps took his Black constituency for granted. As a result, two thirds of all whites still voted against Gantt, the Black turnout was too low to make up this difference — and Gantt was defeated. Whites will frequently vote against other whites if they are perceived as being "too liberal" on racial issues. One good example is provided by Boston, where former anti-bussing advocate-turned-populist Ray Flynn was just re-elected as mayor. Flynn

won strong majorities throughout the city by running on a liberal platform, which included the integration of public housing. But in his own all-white neighborhood of South Boston, a majority of the electorate voted against Flynn.

Second, Blacks continue to be a potential "balance of power" in many gubernatorial and mayoral elections. In Mississippi gubernatorial race, for example, whites voted for reactionary Republican businessman Jack Reed by a three-to-two margin over white moderate Democrat Ray Mabus. However, Mabus carried 90 percent of the Black vote, and was narrowly elected Governor. In Philadelphia, 80 percent of the white voters rejected Wilson Goode. The incumbent was able to survive only by recording a 98 percent majority from the Black electorate. In these situations where candidates obtain office solely on the basis of monolithic Black support, the Black community must develop a coherent set of policy demands and a list of key personnel to be appointed to sensitive positions. We have to engage in tough bargaining to obtain well-deserved concessions even from our "friends," much less than from our political opponents.

Third, and most significantly, Blacks need to rethink the connection between the advancement of individual Black politicians inside the electoral process vs. the need to maximize Black power within the system. All too often, our elected officials have an "individualistic" notion of politics, the idea that they owe their electoral advancement to their innate abilities rather than to the collective strength of Black voters. Power in American society, however, is achieved through conscious, collective actions, not through isolated activity. Individuals may exercise "influence," but only groups wield power.

In their fast pursuit of the American electoral dream, few Black officials are asking themselves how their personal successes are linked to the resolution of the long-term, structural problems of poverty, unemployment, poor education and healthcare inside our communities. Instead of simply pleading for votes every other year, Black politicians should be advancing a coherent, progressive social policy vision which can challenge the "Reaganism" of both major parties. We should expect those who theoretically represent us inside the political process to be able to communicate this policy vision to a mass audience, while developing strategies to increase the political clout of Black working people. Black elected officials all too often have not been in the forefront of movements which advance the pursuit of power.

Civil Rights Journal

Justice for Native Americans

The struggle for African American freedom and justice should never be seen in isolation from the struggles of other peoples who have

also felt the cold, gripping hands of racism and oppression. The plight of Native Americans in the United States continues to expose this na-

tion's reluctance to be fair and just with indigenous Indian peoples.

In the church we are taught that what we do unto the least of those who are powerless, we do also unto God. Too often, though, the reality is different. The powerful maintain their status without even a hint of desire to change the historic power dynamics that undergird domestic social policy in this nation.

Once again, during this Thanksgiving season, there should be a national re-evaluation of governmental policies toward Native Americans. Deeply embedded in the "Pilgrim tradition" is the notion of repentance. Yet, judging from the present policies of the Reagan Administration toward Native Americans — in the cities, on the reservations and in rural areas off the reservation — there is an arrogant, non-repentant "cowboy" mentality which causes Indian people to suffer more.

While increasing military spending, the Reagan Administration has also proposed drastic cuts to programs that serve Native peoples. For example, the Administration wishes to slash \$22.8 million for Native American housing and irrigation projects. Eight out of nine

Native America families now live below the poverty line. And, in many urban areas the unemployment rate has skyrocketed to as high as 80%.

As Dr. Norman W. Jackson, Executive Director of the Council for American Indian Ministry has stated, "Being at the bottom of most social indices of measurement, for example, health, income and education, Indian people sometimes feel too powerless to raise the justice question. But, these questions shout for recognition, for action, for intervention, and demand a change."

We must not allow the cries for justice of our Native American sisters and brothers to continue to echo and reverberate against a stone wall of injustice and insensitivity. The continued unjust imprisonment of Leonard Peltier, a leader of the American Indian Movement, is another example of the nation's vindictiveness toward Native Americans, especially when they dare to struggle for an end to their oppression.

If we want Good News here, it must be in the form of our addressing this national disgrace with candor, confession and change.

Letters to the Editor

Prisoner Says Thanks

Dear Editor:

It gives me great pleasure to write this letter of appreciation for what the Portland Observer has done! It was done from the heart for us as well as the Black community and the State of Oregon.

First allow me to congratulate Mr. Richard Brown for the photos that covered the front page. George A. Gaines and I truly would like to send him our personal thanks. Second we would like to thank Mr. Nyewusi Askari for keeping his faith in his Black Brothers and bringing forth the real truth about the present situation at hand.

This past Friday evening, our community members: A. Halim Rahsaan, Bart Jenkins, and a representative from the Black United Front, plus a host of others, came down to the Black Culture meeting to pledge their support in helping us get these people to follow the law. For that I as well as the

rest of the minority population will be forever grateful to you, Ms. Gary Ann Garnett, because without your help and concern, it might have been impossible to bring about the needed change.

Inclusion to be totally honest, mere words cannot express the true feelings of everyone concerned. So I shall close this off with an old cliché, and tears, and I say "thank you all very much from the bottom of my heart."

Always and Forever
John Dudley Leftridge III

My Hat's Off

Dear Sir:

Firstly, please allow me to take my hat off to whomever is responsible for the hiring of my dear friend and Brother Mr. Askari as a fact-finder for this newspaper. I have read, with heightened interest, every article he has printed. I especially appreciated his article about

our beloved Brother McKinley Burt, who has always been in the forefront of Black awareness for as long as I can remember.

But the main reason I have written is to talk about the most recent article by Brother Askari relating to the Brothers in Salem behind bars.

I know what it's like to be confined, and finally began to understand why. And I think if we all look at what is truly taking place, we see that the criminal justice system will never change the way it operates; for to do so would put hundreds of people out of work, Salem's welfare would suffer greatly, maybe even collapse, without the monies earned by the guards and other officials who run the system.

The system does not intend to ever make a program work that would keep one from returning to jail. If the making of the plates for our cars was contracted to the labor force outside the prison system, it would create jobs for those who in some instances want to work. As long as the Brothers that are confined there wait for the "system",

if you will, to change, they will continue to return.

The dependency that is created by waiting to be told what to do is subtly insuring their return. I would ask those Brothers to re-think their positions and work on a plan to stay out once they get out.

I believe that there are less than one percent of the people who are locked up in the justice system who are first timers, no matter what their color. The other 99-plus percent have been locked away by the system on at least one other occasion.

I see a relationship between people who create and produce, as best they can, the things they require. Since we, as Black people, do not create most of the things we require, we are at the mercy, if you will, of others to create it for us. Should this ever change, our conditions in the society will change, and we will find fewer Brothers behind bars.

Please excuse this lengthy letter. It's my way of saying thanks to your newspaper for its timely articles.

James Bush
Portland, Oregon

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