

EDITORIAL / OPINION

"Mississippi Burning" Distorts History

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

The film "Mississippi Burning" is currently receiving national media attention. The movie, about the murder of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman, three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964, recently captured the cover of TIME magazine. It has also been reviewed extensively in every major daily newspaper wherever the film has opened.

Many film reviewers are acclaiming the film. These reviewers conveniently miss the movie's major fault. "Mississippi Burning" elevates the FBI to heroic proportions when, in truth, that agency was more a part of the problem than the solution. At the same time, the film totally ignores the very people who were heroic—the civil rights

activists who built a movement in Mississippi. In the movie African-Americans are simply background and the movement is non-existent.

A recent edition of CBS-TV's "Nightwatch" program aired a discussion by three civil rights workers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) who worked in Mississippi in 1964. Their comments showed clearly how grossly the role of the FBI was distorted in the film.

June Johnson, whose family was long a bulwark of the movement in Greenwood, Miss., spoke of the FBI's collusion with the local Mississippi police. She recalled that when she was only 14 years old she was brutally beaten in Winona, Miss., along with civil rights activists Fannie Lou

Hamer, Lawrence Buyot and Annette Ponder. Local law enforcement officers were responsible for the beating, yet the FBI suggested to the activists, their faces swollen and bruised, that they had actually attacked each other.

Judy Richardson, veteran SNCC organizer and associate TV producer of the second "Eyes on the Prize," stressed the indomitable courage of the local African-American community in Mississippi, who housed civil rights workers investigating the disappearance of their three missing colleagues.

It is up to all of us to correct the record. We must make sure that wherever the film is shown, the media is encouraged to report the true story of Mississippi in 1964 and today.



by Ron Daniels

VANTAGE POINT:

The King Few People Talk About

"I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must begin the shift from a 'think oriented' society to a 'person oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the grant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered." This is Martin Luther King speaking on April 4, 1967 in New York, at the Riverside Church exactly one year before he was assassinated.

As we celebrate the Martin Luther King Holiday, what we hear most prevalently is the "I Have a Dream" speech (or selected passages from the speech) delivered by King at the March on Washington in August 28, 1963. Amid the pomp and circumstance that has come to surround the King Holiday, there is a real danger that King celebration may be co-opted and converted into an annual ritual which is lacking in terms of substance and action. Hence it becomes imperative that we constantly seek to remind ourselves and educate the people about the real meaning and significance of the life of Martin Luther King.

King was above all a person of extraordinary moral vision and a person committed to bold action to change the wretched condition of the oppressed. Indeed even in the "I Have a Dream" oration, the most telling part of the speech was King's challenge to America to pay up on the "Promissory note" of freedom and justice for all; a promissory note which

King declared had been presented, but had been returned marked "insufficient funds". Thus while laying out the "dream" King did it from the perspective of one who deeply understood the nightmare which continued to plague the lives of millions of African-Americans, minorities and the poor.

This is illustrative of the King few people talk about, or the King that the rulers of America would like to have us forget or worse yet, never learn about at all. To focus on the dream without the "bounced" check, to focus on 1963 as if there was no evolution and development in King's thoughts and deeds after the historic March on Washington. This kind of selective history or selective amnesia is quite convenient for many who now mount the podium to praise his dream, but who either opposed or lacked the courage then and now to put their bodies on the line for the ideals for which King gave his life. It is now safe to sing his praises, it is still risky to struggle for the kind of change that King came to believe was necessary to end racism, economic exploitation, and wars and intervention abroad.

By 1967 when King delivered his "Beyond Vietnam" speech at the Riverside Church, the "dream" had yet to be realized, and the check was still bouncing back marked insufficient funds. King defied his critics and boldly came out in opposition to the immoral war in Vietnam because he said "I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without first having spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government." You are not likely to hear this pene-

trating indictment echoed from any platform during this year's celebration. America is still a violent nation both at home and abroad, and somebody, in King's name out to say it.

King was unrelenting in his criticism of his "beloved" nation. "A nation that continued year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." Martin Luther King knew that America's "thing oriented" and profit motivated materialist society was dying, and he told the nation so. The rich were getting richer, and the poorer were getting poorer—a trend that continues to this very day. As he neared his death King knew that something more than cosmetic changes would be required to solve the problems of racism and poverty in America and the world.

Retrogressive Journalism ... (Continued From Front Page)

whether public funds were diverted inappropriately to publish the NE Reformer, or if the writer has access to a supplementary income that has not been properly reported to those who distribute the public dole.

In recent months we have observed increased amounts of hate mongering, mud slinging and racism expressed unabated in the City of Roses. There has been a strange silence from those who can do something to quell this patent dilemma. At the same time, the super structure of the new Convention Center rapidly moves toward the fruition of significant economic importance. It would be a pity if the festering social ills of this city were to transform that endeavor into just another white elephant.

Perspectives: How To Read History

Part One

The two reading lists in Black History I have provided over the past three weeks have brought an excellent response. Now, with Black History Month at hand, I thought it appropriate to furnish these 'How to read history' tips. My articles will be a little longer and more comprehensive during this period so that any single one may be used for classrooms or for a discussion group. (I will also be available to classroom teachers. Call the Observer, 288-0033).

Historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and linguists usually must be white if their work is to be published by the establishment press. They use a number of standard terms in describing their methodology for uncovering (or covering up) the past. I will examine some of the more important concepts so that you will see how racist interpretations of history are rather easily accommodated by the establishment. The Black authors I cited last week can be of great assistance to your revelations.

MYTH [Greek, 'Mythos']: "Traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or race." If the Greeks spoke on it, it is accepted as fact. If the Africans cite a fact, then the other definition of Webster is used, "Myth ... having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence." A case in point is the folklore view held by the establishment in respect to the Black Inventors of America. Until I researched the field and documented their existence at the U.S. Patent Office. See my book of same title which dispels the myth.

EUHEMERISM, 'U hem er ism': "Interpretation of 'myth' as traditional accounts of historic places and events." This term is derived from the name of an ancient African historian, Euhemeris, but you would have to consult a British biography of philosophers to determine his non-Greek origins. He was the first to develop a structured technique for examining myth to establish the actual events responsible for these traditions of a tribe or race. Euhemeris discovered

that quite often the so called 'gods' worshipped by ancient (and frequently illiterate) people represented tribal histories of great leaders or cultural contributors, handed down through oral traditions.

We have below a very relevant statement from the Encyclopedia Britannica, 1958 edition, Vol. I, p. 131:

"It was not until the gods of Egypt were accepted by the Greeks that there appears to be any ceremony which can truly be called dramatic. The Greek drama arose through the worship of the gods of vegetation, and later developed into the forms of the plays of the great dramatists. It is difficult, however, to think of the drama of the Greeks without thinking of its close connection with the dance."

We are reminded here of my December 15 description of the African Moors who brought their street corner plays and colorful costumes to Italy a thousand years later—the beginnings of the Opera.

In a November 22 article I detailed the African research of the renowned Isaac Newton (Theory of Universal Gravitation) who used the technique of euhemerism to discover and document that there was a 'real' Atlas, King of Mauretania, Africa. Newton established that this Black astronomer and mathematician was first to develop the concept of the sphere, but was deified as a god by the Greeks who were then primitive tribesmen. A major mountain range in his kingdom was named after Atlas, but illustrations always depict him as a white man carrying the world sphere on his shoulders (see Manuel, Isaac Newton: Historian, pp. 84-87).

EPONYM, EPONONOMOUS: "It was common for ancient tribes to call themselves after the name of an ancestor ('eponym')." For instance, historians refer to the Greeks as "Hellenes", 'Hellen' being the name of an ancient tribesman. The Africans had many eponomous heroes-turned-gods—such as Apollo—who

were carried over to Greek tradition. Other African concepts, of course, were adopted into the Greek 'pantheon' as we learned from the Encyclopedia Britannica: The Egyptian goddess Hathor (Love and Music) became Aphrodite in Greece; The African god Thoth (inventor of letters and numbers) became Hermes in the land of the 'Hellenes'. The philosophies surrounding Hermes (Hermetic Corpus) featured "divine revelation" as the source of truth, a concept later to become characteristic of Christian writing" (see Claggett, Science in Antiquity, pp. 149, 150).

The ancient wandering tribes we commonly refer to as Israelites or Hebrews had many eponymic African ancestors—many from the "Asian" lands frequently conquered and colonized by African rulers like Ganges and Ramses II who left religions, treaties and 'geographic' namesakes. Among these Biblical lands were Assyria, Babylon, Ur and Mesopotamia—today's Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Here, there developed particular eponyms like Ham, his son Cush or Kush (Ethiopia, Genesis 10:6), Elam, Shem and Mizraim (Egypt).

You will note that many of these lands were adjacent to that body of water very pointedly called, The Ethiopian Sea (Persian Gulf)—frequently traversed by the Africans. The prophet Isaiah wrote the well known Appeal to Ethiopia: "Ah! land of the buzzing wings, which lies beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, that sends ambassadors by sea. In papyrus vessels on the face of the waters..."

Herodotus, the Greek historian, described the Easterly Cushites of Southern India and Sri Lanka as "Asiatic Ethiopians". Further, he said, "there are two great Ethiopian nations, one in Sinde (India), and the other in Ethiopia" (Godfrey Higgins, Anacalypsis). During their migrations these 'Asiatic' Cushites gave their eponym (name) to the Kush Mountain Range in India. The names of "Cush's sons, Seba and Raamah (Genesis 10:7) have been perpetuated in the Hindu god Siva or Shiva, and in the hero, Rama, an avator of the god, Vishnu. And we remember the Ethiopian King, Ganges, who gave his eponym to India's greatest river.

Dr. Raschidi, in Van Sertima's, African Presence in Early Asia (1985, p. 43) documents these African Cushites even to photographs of the ancient, giant stone heads of Buddah still found at the Anghor Temple—with their "Negroid" nose and lips, and with braids and corn rows. They are exact replicas of the giant Totlec heads left in Central America by other African founders of civilizations. Dr. W.E.B. Dubois was certainly right about the many African diasporas which encompassed the entire Pacific Rim as well as Europe and the Americas (see his, The World And Africa). Dr. Ivan Van Sertima has been a consultant to the Portland School District for a number of years.

Black or white, we must indeed learn "How To Read History." Obviously, we cannot depend upon Travel Agency Brochures to tell us who the people we encounter about the world really are! And it is equally obvious that we have had many frightened, racist wimps masquerading as historians and scholars—who live in terror that Black people may discover who they really are. Later in this series some of these charlatans will be named.

Reagan's Racial Fantasy

by Dr. Manning Marable

For eight years, former President Ronald Reagan was the chief advocate of racial inequality in America. Reagan never pulled the Klansman's sheets from his political closet. He never engaged in the obnoxious political demagoguery of George Wallace or Lester "Axhandle" Maddox. But more than any other white politician of the post civil rights era, he successfully brought together a conservative political ideology of limited federal government, lower taxes and lassiez faire economics, with a conservative racial ideology of undermining affirmative action and equal opportunity legislation.

Reagan was architect of what can be termed "nonracist racism." Superficially, Reagan's utterances on race relations don't seem to be overtly discriminatory. He never stood defiantly at the schoolhouse door, challenging federal authorities on the issue of Black access to public higher education. He never publicly applauded the racist brutalities of the apartheid regime, calling instead for a vague "constructive engagement" with the criminals at the head of South Africa. Reagan went so far as to appoint a Negro to his presidential cabinet, even though by all accounts he became the least effective and most ignored official in Reagan's administration.

But with a fine instinct for the political gutter, Reagan sensed that there was political capital to be made by cultivating the backlash of low to middle income whites against the achievements of the civil rights struggle. Reagan's view of the world, in terms of race relations, was frozen during the Great Depression, pre-World War II period. This was a time in which no Blacks were permitted to participate in professional sports; when there was only one black representative in Congress, and no elected Black mayors anywhere in the country; when the "Black middle class was virtually nonexistent; and when Jim Crow, segregation laws were permanent barriers to Blacks' socioeconomic mobility.

Consistently, the former President

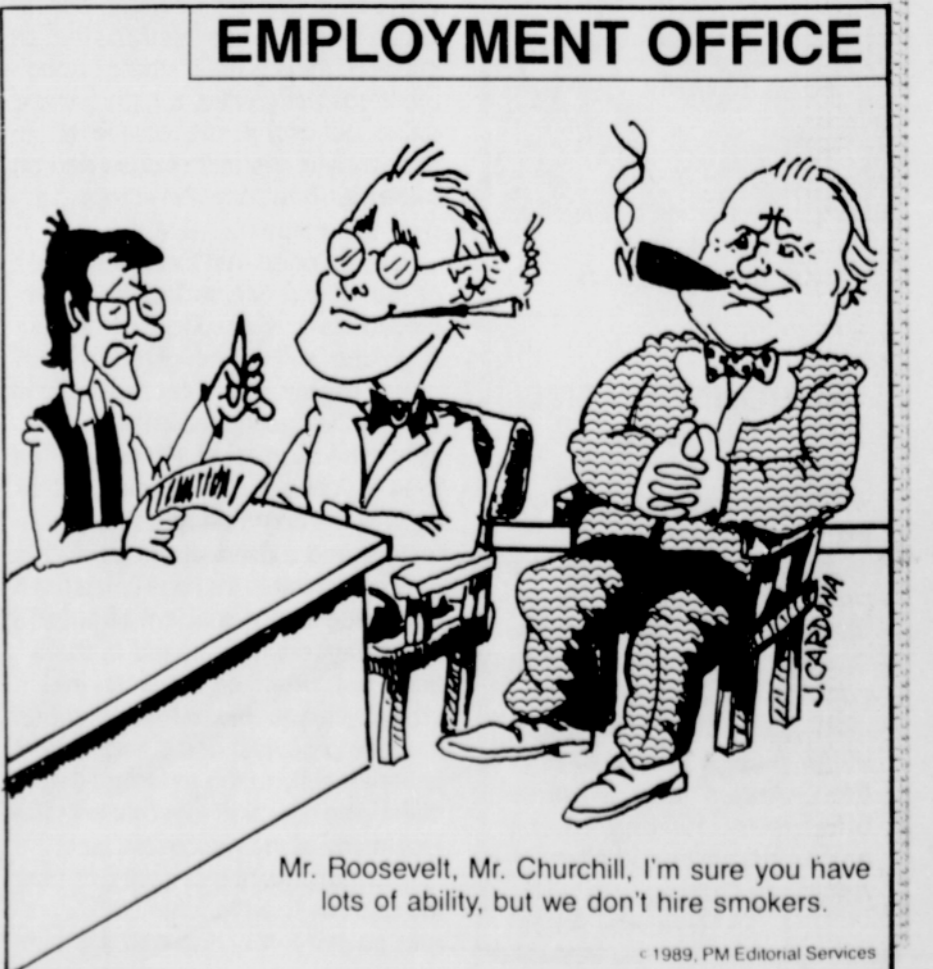
blamed Blacks for their own oppression. When cutting child nutrition programs, public housing and medical care, he crudely blamed those who were on the periphery of despair and starvation for their social marginality. He assured the white middle class that the concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich was the greatest guarantee for protecting the rights of poor. In brief, Reagan understood that the ideological glue for his motley set of reactionary policies was racial inequality. By keeping the poor divided on racial lines, the vast majority of Americans would continue to be fooled and manipulated by the Far Right's destructive policies.

In the twilight of his administration, Reagan could not resist twisting the rhetorical knife in the backs of the Black community's leadership. Reagan insisted in a recent interview that oppressed Blacks were being misled by civil rights leaders and organizations, and that prominent Black Americans such as NAACP head Benjamin Hooks and Jesse Jackson distorted his public record on race relations. "Sometimes I wonder

if they really want what they say they want," Reagan declared. "Because some of those leaders are doing very well leading organizations based on keeping alive the feeling that they're victims of prejudice."

Civil rights leaders quickly and correctly condemned Reagan's latest political broadside. Jesse Jackson responded that Reagan "never saw a piece of civil rights legislation that he would stand up for." Civil rights lawyer and historian Mary Frances Berry termed Reagan's remarks "vacuous." But the reality behind Reagan's assertion is a political effort to turn back the political clock, to the days of segregated water foundations, buses and public schools. Reagan's racial fantasy is to blame Black leaders for the oppression of African-Americans, while reinforcing racial inequality within the economy and society. President Bush's racial agenda is less crude perhaps, but is equally repressive.

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