

# EDITORIAL / OPINION

## CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

### SAMSONS AND DELILA: SLAVERY IN GEORGIA

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

To the shock and abhorrence of thousands of persons throughout the world, the unfolding situation in Waynesboro and Louisville, Georgia where Samsons and Delila Manufacturing Plants are located reveals working conditions resemble abject slavery. For the more than 650 workers, most of whom are African American women, the inhumane management practices by the owner, S.Lichtenburg and Company Inc., has led these workers to cry out for help.

The headquarters and showroom of S. Lichtenburg and Company, Inc. are located on Fifth Avenue in New York City. It is estimated that the total annual sales of this company have now grown to over \$27 million. Since 1965, this company has manufactured curtains and draperies at the Samsons and Delila plants located in rural Georgia.

Not only are the working conditions intolerable, but racist policies are also commonplace when the management consistently promotes non-African American persons to the few highest paying jobs at the factories. In fact in Louisville, Georgia where the Delila plant is located, there is a Slave Market in the middle of the town which serves as a living monument to the era in which Africans were sold as chattel. Now the descendants of these African slaves are receiving slave-like treatment at the hands of up-South, modern slave masters.

In response to the often brutal atrocities committed against any of these workers who would dare to speak out

against the exploitation at the Samsons and Delila plants, the overwhelming majority of these workers recently defied the intimidation of the company by voting to unionize. The workers voted to join the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). On January 19, 1988, they filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to hold a union election. On April 15, 1988, workers at Samsons and Delila voted 413 to 185 to join the union. It was a great victory for the workers and for the trade union and human rights movement in this nation.

Now over a year after that election the S. Lichtenburg and Company, Inc. refuses to recognize the union in violation of state and federal civil rights and labor laws. Georgia Congressman John Lewis, Michigan Congressman John Conyers and many other members of Congress have come forward to demand justice for the workers of Samsons and Delila.

We in the church and civil rights community must not allow these workers to stand alone. No form of slavery and brutality should be tolerated. As we prepare to begin the 1990's, the situation in Waynesboro and Louisville, Georgia demands a national outcry and outpouring of support and solidarity with our sisters and brothers at the Samsons and Delila plants.

We should join with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union in efforts to dismantle the drapes and curtains that conceal the racism and exploitation at these slave plantation plants in Georgia. A victory for these workers will be a victory for all who struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity.

### BENNETT'S DC DRUG WAR MISSES THE POINT

Recently President Bush's National Drug Czar, William Bennett, announced a 100 million dollar multi-year program to rid the nation's capital of the drug trade. The struggle to control the lucrative profits from drugs has erupted into open warfare in Washington, D.C. which has now emerged as the new murder capital of America. Embarrassed by the spectre of the capital to the free world drowning in drugs and overwhelmed by crime and violence, the Bush administration has sent forth its shining white knight, William Bennett to save the day.

Bennett's solution - hire massive numbers of new police officers, build more prisons and lock up hundreds, even thousand of people if need be to improve the image of the nation's capital. No doubt this approach meets with the approval of nervous and anxious federal officials who don't want the word out that the watchdog of democracy in the world cannot safeguard the freedom of its own citizens in its own capital. Ordinary citizens in the affected neighborhoods are also prone to see any program that can reduce the terror in their lives as worthy of consideration.

All of us must certainly be concerned with stopping the scourge of drugs in Washington, D.C. and around the country. Cocaine, crack and heroine are ripping apart the fabric of our communities. The greatest damage is being done in Black and Latino neighborhoods. We should want and must have the full and complete enforcement of the law to prosecute those who are producing, peddling and profiting from drugs in our neighborhoods. To see more police, more prisons and more prisoners alone as the solution misses the point.

According to data compiled by the American Friends Services Committee, in the last ten years the population in the United States increased by 10%. However the prison population during this same period however, more than doubled. During a decade which has been hailed as the greatest period of uninterrupted prosperity in American history, America also experienced a boom in new prisoners and new prisons. Why has there been such a dramatic explosion of drug use, crime and violence?

The Reagan era produced prosperity for some and misery, poverty and prisons for large numbers of growing economic underclass in America. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer. No matter how much policy-makers, law enforcement officials and the public at large try to ignore it, poverty breeds crime and violence. Cut off or diminish, legitimate opportunities for people to grow and develop and people will find alternative to grasp for the "good life".

Lawrence W. Sherman of the Crime Control Institute recently made the following observation about the crisis in Washington D.C. "First the affluent people who buy the drugs help to create the huge demand for crack. Second, there is such inequality that those in the underclass view selling drugs as the only way to success."

America can build as many prisons as its "prosperity" can afford and lock-up countless numbers of new prisoners, but until the question of meeting the needs of the dispossessed is addressed, America will be unable to build enough prisons to contain the multitude that are being criminalized by the nation's policies of neglect.

All of us must come to understand that only through an equitable sharing of the wealth, resources and access to opportunity can we genuinely create a safe and just society. Anything else will simply miss the point.

### AMERICA GOES WILDING

The racial hatred that spews forth from every institution is the fuel that drives America—backward. Everywhere we hear that Black people, in particular young African American men, are less-than-human savages.

Listen to what is being said about Harlem teenagers who are being questioned regarding the rape and beating of the woman jogger in New York City's Central Park last week. "I don't know if it was out of control for these types of kids," said the chief prosecutor for the Family Court Division of the city's Law Department. "I think that kids like this," he said, "given what I would call their predatory nature, are people who, given the chance, would do something like this again. There really isn't any way to control them—at least we haven't found it in the juvenile justice system."

Something very terrible happened in Central Park that night. But we cannot let the sensationalizing salesmanship of the mass media and the pious hypocrisy of the politicians trick us into using our outrage at the dehumanization of this young woman as an excuse to dehumanize OTHER HUMAN BEINGS who because they are Black—are violated and brutalized every day of their lives.

This is not meant to condone in any way what happened on that terrible, ugly night. But if we want to do something about it, we need to understand how it is that people—young people like our children, like my children—come to prey on other people. How is it that we as a society, this country called America, is producing young people who go "wilding"? Who brutalize and terrorize to get their kicks? or to prove their manhood?

I don't believe we can begin to address those questions until we understand that it is not only young Black Men who go wilding. They are, in fact, usually the victims of the institutionalized wilding of the racist marauders. This is a wilding society. And wilding is a respectable activity—when it is conducted by the white corporate owners of America.

W.E.B. DuBois has taught us that racism isn't about having something bad happen to you every day, or every week. Racism is living with the possibility that something bad could happen to you—just because you are Black—any time. Our young men are being driven crazy with rage and fear by that knowledge.

Black and Latino young people have virtually no job prospects while financial assistance for higher education is being cut to the bone. People don't have homes to live in and have been shoved out onto the streets; thousands are dying of AIDS while diseases like tuberculosis—long believed to be eradicated—are claiming new victims at a terrifying rate.

We must root out the bi-partisan corrupters who thrive personally and politically on decadence and who hypocritically scream bloody murder when their own policies come back to haunt them. Our lives, and the lives of our children and grandchildren, are what's at stake.

### "THE EDUCATIONAL UNDERCLASS"

Dr. Manning Marable Along The Color Line

In the 1980s, sociologists have popularized a new term which describes the permanent poverty of millions of poorly trained and uneducated residents of the urban ghetto - the "underclass." This terminology suggests that millions of poor people, mostly Blacks and Latinos, are so thoroughly marginalized by the lack of, decent schools, health care and other institutions that they become virtually irrelevant to the process of production. Many exist at minimum wages or less, or via semilegal or extra-legal means, such as hustling, drugs and petty crime. I have a number of reservations about the term "underclass", in part, because it tends to underestimate the centrality and utility of racism in perpetuating impoverished conditions for people of color.

If an economic "underclass" does exist, its perpetuation and expansion are largely guaranteed by the tragic situation in our public schools. At a time when our economy is demanding a higher level of technical ability, mathematical and scientific skills for the labor force, fewer young people are being academically prepared. The Wall Street Journal recently documented a series of disturbing facts about the educational underclass.

In many states, the drop out rate for nonwhite high school students 50 percent. Across the United States, 3,800 teenagers drop out of school every day. And of those students who stay in schools, millions don't receive any serious training in algebra, geometry, biology, English composition, history or foreign lan-

### PERSPECTIVES

#### BLACK GENIUS-WHITE COVER PART IV

By McKinley Burt

The beauty, the cultural significance, and the wisdom of African literature has scarcely been touched in my writings here. Throughout the ages it has been immense, so I continue in hope that many readers will follow up these leads. May they find new reassurances of our genius and, also, read the old classics from a new perspective that is without their white cover.

We must be able to answer readily such 'put downs' as found in Montet, *Eternal Egypt* (P.220): "Egyptian literature should not be made to appear insignificant though being compared to equal Homer, Pindar Sophocles or Herodotus....and the style bare....no flow of inspiration." What a horrible, ugly aspersion to be cast by a noted historian who knew better, but it is quite "typical".

Just last week I cited the Famous white covers who acknowledged the influence of two great African thinkers, Esop (Esop's Fables), and Lokman (the writer honored by Mohammed The Prophet). These noted covers ranged from Aristotle and Socrates to Julius Caesar and Shakespeare. As we continue here, remember the quote from *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1958 ed., vol.1 p.131): "It was not until the gods of Egypt (and the Sudan) were accepted by the Greeks that there appears any ceremony which can truly be called dramatic." Well, Well, Well!

Keeping that in mind, we may refer to two great African poets and dramatists who have had a tremendous influence upon the worlds' literature and philosophy. The first is Pindar, born in 522 BC in Africa near the city of Thebes, a place that Homer described as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Pindar's writings and style had great influence upon the Greeks who had come to Africa for schooling-and who took their learning home to set up schools of their own. Pindar rejected all that was crude and immoral in their primitive ideas about God and Man, introducing the idea that man was the sinner (see p.79,Soper, The Religions of Mankind).

guages.

Approximately 80 percent of all applicants interviewed by Motorola, Inc., fail an entry-level examination which requires seventh grade English.

Thousands of people are applying for jobs as cashiers and bank tellers who cannot do simple arithmetic. Thousands of high school students are unable to read the simplest instructions. Meanwhile, the new jobs generated by high technology increasingly demand the ability to operate computers and to analyze complex data. The gap is steadily growing between the technical qualifications and academic background necessary for such jobs, and the actual level of abilities for millions in the educational underclass.

Part of the solution would appear to be the recruitment and retention of highly motivated and excellent teachers in the public school systems, especially in the sciences and mathematics. One fourth of all public school instructors will retire in the next 15 years, and a high percentage of younger teachers who are discouraged by low pay and poor working conditions will quit.

It won't be long before a new form of "segregation" will exist to threaten the prospects of millions of Black youth. There won't be the Jim Crow signs of "white" and "colored" to preserve job discrimination. Instead, the new segregation of the twenty first century could be the division between the educated "haves" and the uneducated "have nots." Those who lack scientific, mathematical and computer skills are already disproportionately nonwhite. The struggle for expanded federal expenditures for student grants and improved public schools is directly linked to the economic future of Black America.

Our second African scholar and playwright is Terence at the time of Roman hegemony over Egypt and the Sudan. His writings not only had great influence during this early era, but translations were brought to Renaissance Europe by the culture-bearing Moors from North Africa (along with science and mathematics). His works were crucial to this period of cultural enlightenment which brought Europe out of its Dark Ages. In 1564 Terence's text was listed in curricula for England's schools (as was the work of Esop.

T.W. Baldwin of the University of Illinois (1947) tells us that the two main European playwrights who were exposed to and influenced by Terence were "Shakespeare and Moliere", and that four Shakespearean plays were influenced by his works: *As you like it*, *Love's Labor Lost*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Othello*. Again, did they tell you that in school?

Dr. Edward L. Jones of the University of Washington, a Black Scholar whose articles have been published in the *Portland Oregonian*, has to say in his book *Profiles In African Heritage*. "Now is the time for Black scholars, playwrights, actors and literary critics to start their own research and write their own books about Terence."

In a lighter vein, we quote this interesting statement found next to a photograph of an Egyptian wall painting. (p.144, *Ancient Egypt, Time-Life Books*): Comic strip art was popular in the New Kingdom and included this whimsical papyrus intended as a humorous commentary on the breakdown in the old social order....art, once reserved mainly for religious purposes, came to be used also as an instrument of social protest." Well, Well, 4000 years before Doonesbury!



### ART, YOUNG PEOPLE AND BUSINESS

Submitted by Tom Hampson

The recent flap about spending money for art instead of jail space in prisons has raised questions about when art is appropriate in public places and when it is not. Cascade Business Center thinks we have a place where art, and the kids who make it, have a place. The halls of Cascade Business Center Corporation the small business incubator on Vancouver Avenue is one of those places.

I was looking at our high ceiling, sunlit hall one day and thinking that it would be a great place for art and for an interior designed project. I had also been looking for a way to involve the youth of the neighborhood in our business enterprise center. The hall, the art, the youth all sort of came together and presto! we had an idea. One call to Sherry Brockman, art teachers at Jefferson High School and we had ourselves a project! Ms. Brockman jumped at the chance to do an interior design project with her art students. She also volunteered to provide artwork for our offices on a rotating display basis. It's good too. And believe me I had misgivings. But the students; talents are deserving of the best places in town for display.

We talked to Mr. David fox of a firm called Zephyrsmith which specializes in interior design of large spaces. They volunteered to provide Sherry with ideas on hanging the design work.

Pacific Development Corporation, has provided funds to Cascade for improvements to the building to attract businesses. I called Kandis Brewer, Marketing Director at Pacific, and asked her if she thought this might be a worthy use of Pacific's generous contributions. She said it sounded like a great way to attract business and link the community through the schools into our center.

On May 5th, the tiny model which was built by the art students as part of the design process will be transformed into interior art on a much larger scale, Cascade is providing the materials to hang the art work, the pizza and the pop. Sherry and here Jefferson Students will provide the creativity and the labor. It should be a lot of fun. Drop by and see the project in creation or come later and gaze upon the finished product.

This is a good example how business, our schools, and our community can get together for the benefit of all. We look forward to fostering more partnerships like this. Unfortunately, the story has a downside. They are cutting back the art program at Jefferson so these kinds of projects may be as hard to come by as art in jails. It's too bad. We have just discovered how much of an asset the Jefferson program can be to us.

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