

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Vantage Point

By Ron Daniels

Institutions For Black Empowerment; Independent Black Political Organizations

"No permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interest". This compelling phrase should serve as a basic axiom of African-American political party, interest group, agency, institution or personality. African-Americans should be independent. That is to say free to choose what we believe and what and who we support free of control or decisive influence from forces outside of the African-American Community.

We should mobilize our support on behalf of those who support our interest and agenda, and mobilize opposition to those who are antagonistic to our agenda and interests. In electoral political terms, this may mean supporting Democrats, it may mean supporting independents, or persons not associated with the two major parties. The bottom line is to advance African-American interest and the African-American Agenda. It is to be understood that the African-American Agenda should be a human agenda and therefore not at odds with other groups who also seek to promote human liberation and human development.

Every African-American community in America ought to have an Independent Black Political Organization of some form in order to harness and enhance our political power. Whatever your political persuasion or party affiliation our participation in politics should be governed by our agenda and interest. An independent Black political organization can function to enable the community to set goals, define our interest in relation to those goals, and assist in devising strategies to achieve our goals and to promote and defend our interests. An independent Black political organization (I.B.P.O.) should work to establish a Process and System to facilitate our exercise of political power.

One of the most critical roles which an I.B.P.O. can play is to institutionalize the Black convention concept within local African-American communities. Black Conventions can be the foundation of our independent political process and system even our communities. Black conventions can formulate major pronouncements on issues affecting the Black community, serve as the vehicle for the forging of a Black agenda, and the vehicle to create consensus around candidates for public office.

This latter function can include screening Black candidates for public office to avoid the political fratricide which often occurs when more than one and/or too many African-Americans attempt to run for the same office. This self destructive tendency needs to be avoided at all cost. Hence the I.B.P.O. can be extraordinarily useful by building an effective process for interviewing, screening, and endorsing candidates for public office based on the Black agenda. The same applies for endorsing various ossies such as school levies, bond issues, tax measures etc.

The key to structuring a viable I.B.P.O. is LEGITIMACY and CREDIBILITY. People within the community must come to believe in the I.B.P.O. and be willing to follow its recommendations. The key to this kind of organizational legitimacy is INCLUSIVENESS and INTEGRITY. An effort must be made to include the broadest possible spectrum of interests within the community which are willing to accept the goals, objectives, and principles of the I.B.P.O. Then the I.B.P.O. must be true to its calling and operate in keeping with the Black agenda as adopted by the community. It must function in the best interest of the entire Black community and not in the narrow self-interest of any group or individual exclusively. The people must believe that the I.B.P.O. is HONESTLY functioning in the interest of the community.

Imagine what it would mean if African-Americans could build independent Black political organizations, community by community, all across America to harness our political power based on collective/community goals and interests. We would not be taken for granted and we would be much more highly respected as a group. The net result would be forward progress at an accelerated pace for African-Americans. We need to build Independent Black Political Organizations based on the axiom "no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interest".

Perspectives

McKinley Burt

BLACK INTERACTION IN EUROPE III

Several weeks ago I was absolutely fascinated by a special shown on Channel 10, "Unauthorized Biography of the British Royal Family". Several references were made to a policy of "keeping the royal blood pure". If ever there was a **Comedy of Errors**, this program surpassed Shakespeare's effort.

And if ever there was a thoroughly documented record of African participation in European affairs of state it lies in the images on the **Coats of Arms** (family insignias) of the royalty and other nobility of the continent. This pictorial evidence seen today in Europe's homes, castles and museums shows that the family trees were resplendent with woolly haired, full-lipped Africans. The source for this mode of demonstrating a boastful consanguinity with Africa was a 5000 year-old tradition that began in Ethiopia, Egypt and Nubia (The Sudan).

The African family members are shown as Knights, Bishops, Nobles, and Priests and Academics - Pieces on an ethnic chess set, if you will. J.A. Rogers, the noted Black historian provides us with the largest contemporary display: "Nature knows no color line, N.Y., 1975": Page after page of scores of photographs

of the Coats of Arms of families from England, Holland, Belgium, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia, and the Slavic nations of central Europe.

All of the insignias bear the family surnames which are verified as to African ancestry in Berry, "Encyclopedia of Heraldry": Morel, Morell, Moor, Waldt, Maurelvis, Moreau Negre, Nigrin, Mohr, and many others.

But, to return to the "pure blood" of the British Royal family, Rogers tells us, "Moorish blood came into the family: Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV and mother of Henry VIII, had several Africans in her family, among these Count **More** and Count **Morienne**." Most intriguing is the famous portrait of a beautiful young black woman by Thomas Frye (1719-1762). It is of **Queen Charlotte Sophia**, consort of George III, and **grandmother of Queen Victoria**. In modern times she would have been directed to the **back of the bus** right along with Rosa Parks.

In the middle 1970's The Oregonian newspaper (with tongue-in-cheek) carried an article on dusky Sophia, and accompanied it with a photograph of the royal snuff box graced by a copy of that Thomas Frye painting. But, Africans also came another way. On the opposite side of the throne we find that the noble family of Milford-Haven, cousins of **King George V**, are descended through the Countess Torby from **Alexander Pushkin**, Russia's greatest poet. So there is more to early England than Chaucer, the Domesday Book, Robin Hood, and Charles

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

AFFIRMATIVE RACISM

by Benjamin F. Chavis

The attacks on affirmative action continue to be sustained by the Supreme Court of United States. These attacks were first forecast ten years ago when it was evident that right wing political forces were not only preparing to seize the White House, but also were preparing to fundamentally reshape the character of the highest court in the nation.

Affirmative action had developed historically as a systemic remedy to generations of past discrimination. In particular, African Americans and Hispanic Americans have benefited in the job market from effective affirmative action programs and litigation. In addition, white women, recognized as another group which has suffered from discrimination in the job market, have been able to achieve remarkable advancement because of affirmative action. Yet, at a time when the vast majority of racial and ethnic persons, both male and female, are still facing high unemployment rates and racist employment practices, to legally dismantle the basis for affirmative action is morally reprehensible.

The recent 5-to-4 decision by the Supreme Court giving sanction to legal challenges by white male workers against affirmative action was a devastating blow to the cause of justice. This decision came only a week after another ruling by the Supreme Court that made it easier for employers to implement discriminatory promotion practices. Linda Greenhouse, writing in the New York Times, stated, "The actions show that former President Ronald Reagan has largely accomplished his goal of creating a conservative Supreme Court majority willing to reverse the Court's direction on civil rights."

Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled that white firefighters in Birmingham, Alabama are permitted to challenge a previously court-approved affirmative action agreement which was intended to increase the number of African Americans hired and promoted in the local fire department. This now opens the door for all prior affirmative action "consent decrees" between courts and employers to be challenged and overturned.

We are clear that the attacks on affirmative action are attacks on the progress of the Civil Rights movement. The rights of African Americans and other racial and ethnic communities have been hard fought. We must not allow these gains to be decimated by the continuing racist backlash that is subtly blowing throughout the nation.

Some legal strategists are now saying that the only alternative now is to go back to Congress and to clarify more explicitly legislative intentions concerning affirmative action. The problem is that the present Congress itself is in disarray on issues of race and empowerment. For example, the Congress is now very nervous about legislating comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa at a time when the whole world knows apartheid is getting its strength from United States and other overseas investments. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Congress has the present will to enact legislation re-establishing the grounds for affirmative action.

We believe that progress on affirmative action can only be made if there is a mass outcry in opposition to these Supreme Court rulings. Yet, our outcry must be coupled with grassroots organizing throughout the nation. History teaches us that in the absence of the Movement, i.e. the mobilizing and organizing of millions of justice-seeking persons around this and other civil rights issues, even in the 1990's, there will be no progress. Thus, the rulings of the Supreme Court serve as a challenge and as an opportunity to stand up and get involved once again in a manner that can make a difference.

"ALONG THE COLOR LINE"

Dr. Manning Marable

"C.L.R. James: A Black Political Giant"

Earlier this month, in London, C.L.R. James died at the age of eighty eight. Not widely known in the United States, James nevertheless is one of the most important Black political theorists and scholars of the twentieth century.

Born in Trinidad, James travelled to England in the early 1930s and quickly became involved in radical politics. Collaborating with fellow Trinidadian George Padmore and artist/activist Paul Robeson, James helped to spark a growing movement for Pan-Africanism and the independence of Africa and the Caribbean. He agitated for relief efforts to assist Ethiopia against the invasion of fascist Italy.

In the 1940s and early 1950s James lived and worked in the United States, involving himself in socialist political organizations and learning about the Black movement in this country. He recruited a young African university student named Kwame Nkrumah to join the Pan-Africanist struggle, and via his association with Padmore, helped to initiate the independence movement in the Gold Coast, today's Ghana. In the late 1950s James returned briefly to his native West Indies, leading the unsuccessful struggle to achieve political federation among the former British colonies. While in Trinidad, James brilliantly edited the independence movement's journal, and was chief adviser to leader Eric Williams, his former student.

James was a master of literature, history, political analysis, and social criticism. During his seven years in England in the thirties, he produced some of the most profound works on Black liberation yet available: **A History of Negro Revolt**, **World Revolution**, and **The Black Jacobins**. **The Black Jacobins** is arguably the best single historical study by a scholar of African descent in this century. The book charts the only successful slave revolution in world history, the saga of slave rebel Toussaint L'Ouverture and the revolt in Haiti.

In a sense, history was cruel to James, as it frequently is to all political prophets. James's **Black Jacobins** was ignored at the time of its initial printing, and for two decades it was out of print entirely. James's astute political analysis went largely unread and unrecognized among Black political leaders during his years in the United States. Back in Trinidad, when James raised the necessity to break with an economic and political dependency upon American imperialism, Williams broke sharply with his radical mentor, James's books were banned, and for a time he was placed under house arrest.

James will be remembered by scholars for his eloquent narrative of cultural and racial life in the Caribbean in the early 1900s, entitled **Beyond A Boundary**. His book **Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution** is a detailed account of the triumph of African nationalist Kwame Nkrumah over British colonialism. James's **Notes on Dialectics**, written at the beginning of the Cold War, is a critique of Soviet Communism and the philosophy which leads to authoritarian social control.

Why is James important to us? His intellectual legacy includes several fundamental insights. Unlike most socialists five decades ago, James argued that the Black American working class had its own vitality and unique political history. He believed that the Black movement was potentially the most radical of all American social movements. Second, James emphasized the central role of culture including sports as well as literature, to our understanding of political change. And most importantly, James was a radical democrat. He opposed all forms of censorship, and advocated full democratic rights for all, whether in capitalist or Communist countries. I was fortunate to have met James, and to have spent a day with him two years ago, discussing politics.

James would stand side by side with the Chinese students in Beijing who struggled for democracy. He would be with us in our struggle against racism and economic inequality here in the U.S. James will be remembered as a fighter for Black freedom and democracy.

VERRIDE THE MINIMUM WAGE VETO

By John E. Jacob

On the same day that President Bush vetoed a minimum wage bill passed by Congress, the newspapers reported that Congressional and Administration experts were studying a proposal to cut the capital gains tax.

That puts the spotlight on the minimum wage as a fairness issue, at least as much as it is an economic issue. And if fairness is any test, Congress should override the veto. The President was ill-advised in vetoing the bill. A higher minimum wage advances his vision of a "kinder, gentler nation," and the Administration should have been pushing for a higher wage. The President did support a raise in the minimum and only 30 cents an hour separates his proposal from that passed by Congress -- hardly enough of a difference to go to the mat over.

The bill would have raised the current minimum of \$3.35 per hour to \$4.55 in three years. Even that would have left the legal minimum wage below family poverty levels.

The arguments against a higher minimum are long familiar -- it would curtail job growth, it would benefit teenagers who don't need the extra money, it would impose burdens on employers and make them less competitive. None of those arguments are persuasive.

No one disputes the fact that increasing employer payroll expenses would mean some lost jobs at the margin, but few economists think the toll would be more than 100,000 and many believe it would be less.

The teen worker argument is also flawed. Teenagers make up only about a fourth of minimum wage workers. Two-thirds are women and almost four million are heads of households. About 4.5 million men, women and children live in families in poverty where the head works at the minimum wage. The minimum is so low that a full-time worker can work all year round and still be below the poverty line.

As for the competitive argument, if the minimum applies to all employers they'd still be competing on level ground, so that one won't wash either.

Balanced against the marginal negative effects of a higher minimum are major positives. Poor families with workers would have higher incomes. Teenagers from low income families would be better able to help their families out of poverty.

And the biggest plus of all would be that the drift to greater inequality in incomes would be slowed. Our system would be more fair, and fairness is the bedrock of any system. Anyone who doubts that need only look at the way the communist countries' leaders are being challenged because of the unfairness of their system.

Yet another flaw in the opposition to the higher minimum is the belief that it would ratchet wages up throughout the economy and fuel inflation. In fact, the minimum wage -- even the higher one passed by Congress -- is too low to have a perceptible effect on inflation. And so many employers are exempted from the bill's requirements that most small businesses and non-profits would not have to pay it.

The market dictates higher wages anyway. The slowdown in the growth of the labor force has led many low-wage employers to boost their wages beyond even the new higher minimum. So opponents of the higher minimum are driven by ideology, not reality.

It is unconscionable to tell low-wage workers in poverty that their work shouldn't pay enough to let them climb above the poverty line, while at the same time pushing a measure that would let affluent taxpayers cash in on lower rates for capital gains.

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Dickens - -And asking sleepy students for the date of the Battle of Hastings.

No wonder, then, that an Oxford Dictionary tells us that "the term **Blackamoor**, now a nickname, was formerly without deprecatory force". Certainly not, since in its various forms it so proudly appeared on half the Coats of Arms of European families. And it is no more wonder that England's most popular rhythmic frolic is the **Morris-Dance** brought there by the Africans who came with the Roman legions. Have you paid any attention largely to the **Irish Jigs** - or to the heraldry of the **Scottish Clans**? Or to the fact that earlier on the Scottish marching bands were noted not as much for their bagpipes and swirling skirts as for their seven-foot African drummers who synopated each unit?

It has occurred to me how unfor-

tunate it is that the same Africans did not also bring to the British Isles their very sophisticated astronomy. Then, England would not be embarrassed by that rather primitive eyesore, **Stonehenge**. Next week, **Napoleon's** interaction with Africa, or France, the **New Africa**.

Footnote: Have you notice lately how the establishment media in America has been deploring the attitude of their Chinese counterparts? They must learn the "open and fearless" dissemination of information is the foundation of a free society. Perhaps the Americans should begin speaking to each other and to the publishers of textbooks and histories, And perhaps Bloom, in his "The Closing of the American Mind" missed the door closed tightest of all: **The African Presence**.