

EDITORIAL / OPINION

TO BE EQUAL COURT DAMAGED RIGHTS

by John E. Jacob

That noise you may have heard at the beginning of July was probably the collective sigh of relief that the Supreme Court's term ended. At least the Justices won't be able to do any more damage to the flimsy fabric of civil rights until the fall term starts.

Not that they didn't do enough damage already. The term just ended was the most disastrous in memory.

Just look at some of the more devastating rulings it came up with:

The Court rolled back local government setaside programs designed to encourage minority businesses and to compensate for past discrimination.

It allowed white male employees to sue to overturn court-approved affirmative action programs that remedy historic discrimination against blacks. But in another case, it refused that same right to women employees seeking to challenge discriminatory seniority programs.

It lowered an employers' burden of proof to the weakest possible standard in cases alleging promotion discrimination.

It made it far more difficult for employees to win discrimination cases by limiting use of statistics that show disparities in jobs held by white men and those held by women and minorities.

It overturned use of an 1866 civil rights law in cases charging racial harassment and discrimination, forcing victims to use other, more difficult standards.

It weakened the rights of accused persons by diluting the so-called Miranda rules, letting stand a conviction where the accused was denied legal representation at the time of arrest.

It approved the death penalty for minors and retarded persons, overturning long-held precepts that such a penalty represents "cruel and unusual punishment."

And it narrowed privacy rights and the right of women to make their own reproductive decisions by upholding a Missouri law restricting the right of abortion.

This latter case, Webster v. Reproductive Services, is the prelude to forthcoming cases in which the Court appears likely to reverse the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that established the constitutional right to abortion.

The decision will unleash a bitter, divisive battle in state legislatures as the anti-abortion movement will fight to push state laws to the other limit of what is constitutionally permissible.

And it's going to poison American politics for years to come as the militant anti-abortionists will make allegiance to their position the only electoral test for politicians seeking office. We may just wind up an effective ban on abortions and with government deciding whether a woman will bear a child.

Whatever one's personal attitude toward abortion, since 1973 there have been strict constitutional limits that preserve both a woman's right to control her own body and the state's legitimate interest in preserving life.

The Court is now launching our society into a bitter battle over a social issue that had been settled in a satisfactory manner for all but a minority of zealots.

The immediate effect of the Webster decision will be to sharply limit poor people's ability to terminate unwanted pregnancies, since it allows public facilities to refuse treatment. Meanwhile, the affluent can get abortions at will in private establishments.

All, in all, this Supreme Court term has been a disaster for human rights advocates, and we must look to the President, Congress, and state legislatures to remedy the damage done to rights by the Court."

Along the Color Line "Do the Right Thing"

Dr. Manning Marble

Spike Lee's latest film, "Do the Right Thing," has provoked the greatest political debate and controversy since the polemics surrounding the film version of Alice Walker's "The Color Purple." As in the previous controversy, critics and defenders alike have focused less on the relative merits and weaknesses of the film as a work of art, and have focused instead on the movie as a cultural litmus test on race relations and the question of political powerlessness within African-American communities. What's required at this point is to separate an analysis of Lee's film from the charges and countercharges engendered by the movie, in order to shed light upon the broader political and social significance of the issues raised by the debate.

"Do the Right Thing" was written, produced and directed by Spike Lee, a 32 year old African American filmmaker, who has previously done two movies on Black-oriented topics. Lee's motivation for developing the film was sparked by the death of Michael Stewart, a graffiti artist who was killed by transit authority officers in New York for allegedly resisting arrest. The events of Howard Beach, New York, in which Black men were assaulted and one killed by a gang of white racists, further crystallized Lee's concerns about the state of race relations in America's largest city.

The essential storyline of the film is as follows: Based in a Black and Hispanic neighborhood in New York's Bedford Stuyvesant area, the events take place during one hot day during the summer on one city block. Lee presents a series of characterizations of Black low income people, undereducated and jobless, but with a real sense of dignity and humanity. The characters include two Black elders, excellently portrayed by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee; Bugging Out (Giancarlo Esposito), the local neighborhood's activist who is upset by the lack of Black-ownership in the community; Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), a huge young man with an equally large ghetoblaster; Smiley (Roger Smith), a young man with a speech defect who nevertheless represents the most politically advanced character in the entire film by his advocacy of the ideas of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.; and Mookie, played by Lee himself, an unmarried father who works at an Italian American-owned pizzeria in the heart of the Black community.

The central antagonism develops when Bugging Out complains to the owner of the pizzeria that there should be photographs of prominent African American artists, athletes and political leaders in the shop almost exclusively patronized by Blacks and Hispanics. When the owner refuses, bugging out organizes a small boycott which leads to a confrontation. Radio Raheem's ghetoblaster is smashed by Sal, the owner, and a fight ensues. The police are called and in typical fashion respond by choking Radio Raheem to death. Mookie leads the outraged residents to attack and destroy the pizzeria.

Let's focus first on the main elements or themes which Lee is attempting to explore here. Metaphors abound in the movie. Unintention-

ally, by projecting Smiley as a stutterer who sells photos of Malcolm and Martin, the film seems to say to us that the legitimate voices of resistance and activism in our communities are frequently held down or denigrated. There's a dialectical tension underscoring the whole film from beginning to end between a hope for interracial peace and nonviolent change vs. the need for group solidarity, empowerment and an advocacy of armed self defense against racist brutality. This is reason for Lee's uses of Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" and the National Black Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing", at the opening of the film, and the quotations from Malcolm and Martin at the conclusion.

Politics and power are at the heart of the film. We are shown black men and women who are out of work or marginally employed, living in neighborhoods which are controlled economically by nonblacks. The police treat African Americans with contempt, functioning like an occupying army in enemy territory. One is struck by contemporary parallels to Palestine or perhaps the bantustans of South Africa. To ensure the property, businesses and lives of white occupiers, the police make selective examples of nonwhites through the utilization of extreme coercion. Thus Radio Raheem's execution is not accidental, but typical of a larger question of white political combination and Black oppression.

"Do the Right Thing" also presents the contradictions of Black-white relations by examining the personal ambiguity between the white storeowner Sal (Danny Aiello), his two sons and Mookie. The film graphically depicts the extreme racism of one son who defines Blacks as animals, yet Sal is proud of his establishment and his cordial relationship with most patrons. Mookie initiates the looting of the store after Radio Raheem's death, yet the morning after Sal is prepared to pay his former employees twice what he is owed. The reason that the film strikes a responsive chord here is because race relations are complex, not simplistic. Whites who are profoundly racist frequently can hate an entire group of people yet make exceptions in their relations with individuals. Sal's failure isn't personal, it's political. Bugging Out doesn't want to marry Sal's daughter, or to force him to sell the pizzeria. He only wants Malcolm's and Martin's pictures on the pizzeria's wall as symbolic of recognizing the heritage and humanity of the patrons. Sal's refusal is fundamentally the refusal of white racism to recognize that human rights go beyond property rights.

A number of confused critics, Black and white, have attacked Lee for making a film which supposedly advocates violence. Journalist Juan Williams complains that the movie lacks "vision" and promotes racial confrontation. If Williams, et al. really lived in the innercity they'd understand that Lee's film actually understates, if anything, the race and class tensions in contemporary America. "Do the Right Thing" provides a complex and dynamic examination of American racism.

INSTITUTIONS FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT: THE BLACK UNITED FUND

We as Black people tend to pay for what we want and beg for what we need. As African-Americans we have yet to learn the wisdom of harnessing our own resources to develop our own communities. While it is true that we have vast numbers of our people (perhaps 30%) who live in poverty, collectively we do have resources. Considered as an African nation in America, African-Americans have a gross annual income of more than 250 billion dollars a year. In that context we would be considered one of the most prosperous developing nations in the world. To reiterate, the problem is that African-Americans have not internalized the concept of using our dollars for our own development.

This is not a new found revelation. Throughout our history there have been a stream of African-American leaders who have sought to teach the value of self-help, self-support, and self-development. Martin R. Delaney, Bishop Henry M. Turner, Booker T. Washington, Madame C.J. Walker, W.E.B. Dubois, Marcus Garvey, Mary McCloud Bethune, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King are but a few of our distinguished leaders who have appealed to us to take seriously the need to invest our resources in our own self-development.

Though one can argue with some merit that African-Americans have there should be an institution which functions for the African-American community in the same manner that the United Way functions for the community in general. African-Americans need to provide the primary funding bases for our civil rights organizations, civic associations, cultural, educational, economic and political development projects and programs.

A Black United Fund is simply a broad based community effort to harness some of the billions of dollars that flow through our communities every year to support our own institutions and our own community development. Individual donations, fund-raising projects, corporate and institutional contributions and payroll check-off are among the means which can be used to provide a pool of capital for the Black United Fund. Long term investments, developing endowments and leveraging existing resources to receive grants in the

gotten somewhat better at self-support since the sixties, our commitment to self-help still falls far short of what is required to make us a strong, viable and effective national community. Our major civil-rights organizations and institutions of higher learning from the N.A.A.C.P. and Urban League to the United Negro College Fund are principally supported by labor, corporations, or individual white donors. Most of our community based organizations and agencies would not survive without white good will and philanthropy. The shaping of a pattern of institutions for black empowerment will require massive support in terms of dollars from Black people. If we seek to achieve power to enhance the development of our communities then we must kick the habit of paying for what we want and begging for what we need.

Every African-American community in the United States should have a United African-American Appeal, a United Black Fund, or a Black United Fund. In every community public and private sectors are strategies which can greatly expand the impact of resources raised within African-American community is off and rolling.

Fortunately due to the pioneering work of people like Jim Joseph, the late Walter Bremond, and Calvin Rolark, there are Black United Funds or United Black Funds in a number of cities including New York City, Detroit, Washington D.C., Houston, Atlanta and Los Angeles. However none of these funds enjoy the widespread and massive support that is required for them to have major impact. Indeed some of them require grants from white foundations or the United Way for their very survival.

In the final analysis institution for Black empowerment cannot be built and maintained unless we as African-American are committed to support these institutions with our own dollars. It is still true that "he who pays the piper picks the tune". Our institutions cannot play the kind of liberating tunes we need unless we ante-up. The vital importance of self-help for self-development is a key cultural value and ideological tenet which we must continue to drive into the hearts and minds of our people. "No one else will save us, but us".

United Funds are an indispensable institution for Black empowerment. We as African-Americans must pay the price for our own liberation.

BLACK/JAPANESE RECONCILIATION -- A MOVE TOWARD SOLIDARITY

by Mark Goss

Tokyo, Japan on Saturday June 24, 1989, The World Rally of Black Activists (WRBA) convened its preparatory meeting. The WRBA is the brainchild of Mr. Ryosuke MARSUURA, a prominent Japanese human rights activist. "Insensitive, Reckless and irresponsible" statements were made by two top Japanese politicians regarding African-Americans. Matsuura and other responsible Japanese feel that the statements were an insult not only to African Americans, but to the entire Black World.

Mr. A. Akbar Muhammad, representative of the Nation of Islam, delivered the keynote address, said that, Nakasone, Watanage and an unnamed Japanese manufacturer who recreated a 'sambo' doll, must have received their information from their contact with White America. I don't honestly believe that they hired a Black consulting firm, or sent Japanese researchers to the Black communities in America to justify their reckless and unfounded statements."

Mr. Seiho TAJIRI, a Japanese business man living in America, attended the conference. He has worked for twenty years with various African-American organizations in attempt to strengthen business relationships between Japan and Black America. Tajiri revealed to those in attendance that there is a tendency for some American Tour Agents to discourage Japanese visits to Black Communities.

The honorable Rossie Douglas, MP from the Island of Dominica in the Caribbean, urged the Japanese to review the method by which monetary aid is given to Third World Nations. Traditionally, aid is given through former Colonial Masters.

Keba B. Cisse, Ambassador from Senegal and Faustin P. Maganga, Student and QRBA Coordinator from Tanzania stress that it is important that Japan develops a "proper" relationship with Africa. Japan is an Island nation of nearly 150 million people and will need vital resources from Africa going into the next century.

Spartacus R., musician and Director of the Cultural Awareness Program in London spoke on the need for proper recognition of Africa and her cultural, philosophical and scientific contributions to world civilization.

Mr. Matsuura plans to build an international organization based on mutual respect, human dignity and world peace. Plans are now underway for five regional plenary sessions for the WRBA. The first meeting will be held in the Caribbean - September 1989; United States - October 1989; Europe - December 1989; East and West Africa - January 1990. These meetings will be concluded with a World Rally of Black Activists to be held in Brazil in 1990. At the conclusion of the Conference, The Tokyo Declaration of the WRBA for World Peace and Human Dignity was read and accepted by conference attendees and will be sent to Black Newspapers and organizations around the world.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL THE CRISIS OF BLACK YOUTH

Whitney Houston sings "I believe the children are our future. Treat them well and let them show the way". The future of African-Americans is in jeopardy because BLACK YOUTH ARE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.

We'll like everything else in the African-American community, it depends on your vantage point. If you are among the more fortunate within our community, the top 20% whose incomes increased dramatically in the last decade, then perhaps your young sons and daughters are not at risk. But the sons and daughters of a vast number of African-Americans are in serious crisis. This is particularly true of those who struggle to survive amongst the abandoned ghetto class; those who are locked out, left out, neglected and locked up.

Because some African-Americans are now doing quite well, America, and indeed even some African-Americans suffer from an illusion of progress. In reality there is an explosive time bomb ticking away in the depths of the Black community, and at the bottom of America's economic pyramid. African-American youth, particularly Black males are being destroyed by inferior education, staggering unemployment, drugs, violence, aimlessness and frustration. America doesn't seem to care. And judging by the lack of urgency in our actions the African-American community is complacent, unconcerned or too busy enjoying the "good life" to pay attention to the wholesale destruction of Black youth in our midst.

Despite progress in race relations over the last 25 years, racism remains a major contributing factor in the devastating crisis confronting African-American youth. In 1986 unemployment among young Black males stood at 74% as compared with 52% for young white males. In fact the last two decades have failed to produce significant gains in terms of Black youth employment. In the mid-fifties Black and white teenage employment rates were about the same, 52%. By 1989 however, Black teen employment had declined drastically to 27%. White teen employment remained at about the same level.

In an alarming development, there is a large and increasing segment of Black youth who are passing into adulthood without any job experience whatsoever. They are a part of an expanding economic underclass. Without a job it is difficult to develop a sense of pride and self-esteem in the middle of an affluent, acquisitive, materialistic society. Without a legitimate job it's easy to turn to the illicit street economy of drugs, crime, vice, violence and death.

An angry dispossessed class of African-American youth are now lashing out against society. They are the victims of genocidal governmental policies which invest in star wars, exotic bombers, spacecraft, and a variety of missiles while neglecting to invest in education, housing, health care, and jobs for our young people. They are the victims of Reagan's "voo-doo economics" which worked magic for the wealthy and created devastation and misery for the masses of African-Americans imprisoned in America's urban ghettos.

The most tragic casualty of this blatant neglect, however, has been the deterioration of VALUES, the weakening of Black families, and the shredding of the fabric of the African-American community. Black youth are self-destructing in the face of America's genocide and we as African-Americans seem incapable of caring enough to rescue, nurture, and develop our future. Our youth are rampaging out of control, on their own.

Those who HAVE within the African-American community are either embarrassed by our youth, disdainful of them or blame them for the problem. The HAVE NOTS within our community are immobilized by the sheer struggle to survive, or terrorized into inaction.

America has a huge time bomb on its hand. The National African-American community has a monumental crisis which it must squarely face or risk an uncertain future. The crisis facing Black youth must be solved or WE'RE HEADED FOR SELF-DESTRUCTION.

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