

EDITORIAL / OPINION

TO BE EQUAL CIVIL RIGHTS -- 25 YEARS LATER

by John E. Jacob

The recent White House celebration of the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a reminder that race remains a major national issue.

In 1964, the nation struggled to overturn legal segregation and to assure African Americans and other minorities basic constitutional protections other citizens took for granted.

In 1989, there is a worrying lack of consensus about how we can remove race as a factor that limits peoples' aspirations and accomplishments.

The White House ceremony took place in the shadow of recent Supreme Court rulings that reflect the conservative tide of the past decade -- a new national mood unwilling to tolerate the necessary efforts to remedy the legacy of racial oppression and the persistence of discrimination.

And it took place at a time when a Census Bureau analysis of poverty statistics found little change since the late 1960s.

For a while in the decade of the sixties, the poverty gap was closing and black income rose. But with the anti-poor mood of the 1980s, the Bureau has found that the poverty gap has grown. Today's poor are further below the poverty line than yesterday's.

Some say that's not a civil rights issue -- but it is. You can't separate rights from status and economic outcomes.

Our system was built on exploitation of black labor and the exclusion of African Americans from equal opportunity. The civil rights laws of the 1960s sought to remove the legal basis for that inequality and to enable minorities to compete on an equal footing.

It's not enough to say that the laws have made us a colorblind society when the practices of our society result in very color-conscious outcomes such as disproportionate black poverty.

The original civil rights movement was well aware of that distinction -- the 1963 March on Washington that led to passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was made under the banner: "Jobs and Freedom."

The initial struggles to secure freedom by changing the laws and winning full constitutional protections were logically followed by the thus far less successful effort to end poverty and to assure full equal opportunity.

Equal opportunity doesn't simply mean removal of specific barriers to individual progress. It needs to be implemented by education, employment, health and housing advances that assure ultimate rough parity between the races in the major areas of life.

The major difference between the 1960s and today is that in the sixties there was a national consensus that segregation and racially-based inequality was morally wrong.

Today's moral climate is weaker. Too many political leaders and judges refuse to see the moral tragedy of continued racial injustice. They pretend our nation is now colorblind; that race is not a factor in life's outcomes, and that the effects of past racism do not reach into peoples' lives today.

So they fight measures to reduce economic inequality and deliver decisions that throw up new barriers to the victims of discrimination and poverty.

To a large degree their actions reflect the legacy of Reaganism, but we have to realize that we can't pin it on one man -- Reagan largely reflected the views of many in a nation tired of reform and indifferent to moral claims.

We need to rekindle the moral fervor that led America to make such sweeping changes in the late 1960s, and to finally complete the positive revolution begun then.

A NEW POLITICAL DAY IS DAWNING

From Marcus Garvey and Paul Robeson to Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Minister Louis Farrakhan, the Reverend Al Sharpton, and attorneys Alton Maddox, Jr. and C. Vernon Mason, we have seen our leaders cut down--maligned, imprisoned, murdered--for the crime of defending the Black community.

When Black leaders step out to lead, the Powers That Be move quickly to punish them. The law is turned into a weapon--not in the cause of justice but against it; the white corporate--owned media lend themselves to the task--which is not to expose the truth but to invent lies; and the official Black leadership (those who have sold themselves to white corporate America at the expense of the Black masses) jump on the bandwagon--not to stand up with their sisters and brothers under attack but to repudiate them.

These phony black leaders--most of them hog-tied to the Democratic party--have the job of cooling out the black community while ensuring that no new, independent black leadership emerges to bring our people out of bondage. For as we know only too well, Abraham Lincoln (the "Great Emancipator") never intended to abolish slavery; the northern industrialists for whom he won the Civil War were just concerned with freeing Black labor for their won use west of the Mississippi. And those who profit from the enslavement of black people are still not willing to let us go.

Today a new generation of Black leaders is emerging. We are not intimidated by the attempts to silence us, to discredit us, to wrench us away from the Black community by calling us names--"tax evaders," "police informers," "sexual perverts," "extremists," "anti-Semites." We know that we cannot rely on the old leaders, the ones who long ago sold the Black community for a mess of pottage, to defend our people in the war that is being waged against us. And we recognize that it is Black people themselves who must enlist

as soldiers in the resistance against genocide.

When I say that white corporate America is conducting a genocidal war against the Black masses, I am not just using "a figure of speech." I am talking about war--dislocation, imprisonment, brainwashing, torture and death. I am speaking about the physical, political, cultural and psychological destruction of a people by any means necessary--guns, drugs, terror, deprivation and humiliation.

As the chairperson of the independent New alliance Party, I am leading a movement to empower our people and the sisters and brothers who are our allies in this life and death struggle. A new political day is dawning. We--the women of color who are helping me to build and lead the independent political weapon that the black community and other endangered peoples can use in our own defense.

As an independent candidate for mayor of New York, I am calling on the people of the city to follow me into battle. Because the time has come when the African American community has to decide whether it is going to continue following Black Democrats who year in and year out mislead our people, who have delivered the community into the hands of our enemies, who have betrayed the Black masses over and over again while demanding our loyalty simply because they are Black!

The question is what the Black community is going to do about it? What are the Black people of New York going to do about the fact that Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins--the senior black elected official in the city, whose bid for the Democratic Party's mayoral nomination I am supporting--has said publicly that he did not want my support and would not meet with me? Such an attack is not just an attack on me, an independent black woman. It is an attack on the tens of thousands of people who are supporting my independent campaign. Because if I am ignored, if I am excluded from the political dialogue, the masses of our people will not be heard. And the African American community needs to decide whether it wants to be heard or not. Our people need to decide whether they want our communities to be empowered, or

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL IN HONOR OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Every day we read in newspapers and see on our television sets story after story about the problems of African American youth. We are told about the crack epidemic and its impact on young people, about young people dropping out of school in large numbers, about gang wars and crime and violence. We are told and warned that in particular racial and ethnic children in the United States are now being doomed for future hardships. These are true stories and stories which should challenge all of us to find new and effective ways to save especially African American children, who are twice as likely to die in their first year of life, who are three times as likely to be poor and four times as likely to be incarcerated between the ages of fifteen and nineteen as white American children. Indeed, the very future of an entire race is being challenged by all of these terrible facts which African American children must face.

But the reality is that all too often we are only told the negative stories about African American children. All too often we do not hear the stories of the African American valedictorians who are graduating from high schools across this country, of the young people who volunteer with local civic and community groups; of the successful athletes, artists and scholars who are making significant contributions to their communities and, often, to their churches.

At a recent convocation of the Ministers for Racial and social Justice and United Black Christians of the United Church of Christ held in Fort Worth, Texas, eight-year old Wiletra Burwell of Warrenton, North Carolina spoke to nearly a thousand people who had gathered to hear Mayor Andrew Young at that important gathering. Wiletra nearly brought the house down with her eloquent speech, which she wrote herself and delivered impeccably.

But rather than tell about Wiletra's speech, I decided to reprint it here because it gives hope and challenge to us all:

I AM THE BLACK CHILD

"I am the black child! All the world awaits my coming. All the earth watches with interest to see what I shall become. Civilization hangs in the balance, for what I am, the world of tomorrow will be. I am the black child! You have brought me into this world about which I know nothing. You hold in your hand my destiny. You determine whether I shall succeed or fail, Give me, I beg you, a world where I can walk tall and proud for I am the black child..."

I feel I must say to you that all of us are not interested in drugs and vulgar rap music...I say to you adults this evening, pray for us. Forbid us not from participating and from being included. Know that our generation needs more love, more understanding, and we certainly need some more inspiration. We need the same kind of inspiration that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and many others gave to you.

Many times, adults accuse us of being apathetic, but I say to you that for the most part we are not apathetic, that we are concerned about today's issues. We are concerned about education. We are concerned about apartheid and about our brothers and sisters in South Africa. No, we are not apathetic, but I must tell you some of us are uninspired. So, I challenge each of you adults to work a little harder at loving us more; work a little harder at understanding us better; and then, work a little harder at inspiring us, at providing us with good inspiration -- for what we are the world of tomorrow will be."

We hear you Wiletra. We are touched by your eloquence and you render honor to African American children. Let us all get to work to live up to your challenge.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR A Far Cry From M.L.K.

The city of roses, in the 1960's along with the rest of America experienced the trials and tribulations of the Civil Rights movement. A lot was accomplished due to strong Black leadership. Leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, and Medger Evers, in their times, relentlessly fought and struggled to get out of the backs of busses, into desegregated schools and on to a better economic frontier. Death is what they received for their efforts. Good leadership in black communities all over America today is seriously lacking. Call it politics or apathy, it may be both, whatever the cause black leaders are not, and may never be, as strong as they were in the days of M.L.K.

In Martin's day we could see that we had something to struggle and fight for, not to say that we no longer have anything to fight for. Now we face an even a greater enemy in Portland's Northeast community, i.e. lack of leadership. Good leadership could be the answer, but who's willing to take the podium next? Portland is a beautiful city. However, it is threatened by the illicit drug trade as gangs decide the fate of many young men in the Northeast community.

One man has never been able to do it all alone, but then, who was there when Mrs. Rosa Parks decided to remain seated. Portland's Northeast community, like many, has allowed itself to be pacified; but by

not. They need to decide whether they want to change this rotten, corrupt and oppressive system--or not. They need to decide whether they want to applaud me and shout, "Right on, sister!" but still support Demo-

what? A good paying job, if you look the other way? A raise if you don't tell anyone what you've seen? The promise of a little status if you hold the nail while I swing the hammer? It is very hard to say, "No", to getting ahead even when it means leaving your brothers and sisters behind.

The Northeast community may be rotten, but certainly not to the core. A little minor surgery and the community could be repaired. Right now, this community is suffering from a severe lack of; good strong leadership, and parents who care as much for their neighbor's children as they do for their own, to name a few. It seems that many who can make a difference have already been sucked in, or kicked out.

"Rock stars" are on the rise. Babies are being born addicted. The man you've known for years who has always held a full time job is now selling drugs to make ends meet, or using drugs because enough is too much. Someone should turn back the clock, because we're not ready to continue. When all of the faking stops maybe we can be what ever it is that we want to be, and come together and save our community.

Good leadership in the form of parents, teachers, churches, and local politicians, combined is most likely the answer to our community's problems. Realizing the importance of having good leadership in our community is what will make a difference. Waiting and expecting help from the outside is fine, but developing our own is better.

Ruth E. James

crats. Or do they want to win the war against our people? And do they want it badly enough to do something radical, independent, and different from what the old leaders are telling them to do?

Along The Color Line

Dr. Manning Marable

"A Woman's Right to Choose"

The Supreme Court's ruling on abortion sparked a major political debate across the country in recent weeks. As expected, the high court did not overturn the landmark Roe v. Wade decision which established legal abortions nearly two decades ago, but instead greatly curtailed the access of lower income and unemployed women to safe abortions. By a five-to-four vote, the Court declared that states do not have to provide funds, facilities or employees for abortions, or to encourage or counsel women to have abortions. If states adopt such restrictions, this decision could affect almost all hospital abortions, which comprise about 10 percent of the 1.5 million abortions done annually.

More ominously, however, the recent abortion decision indicated that four of the nine justices were fully prepared to overturn Roe v. Wade. Three of the pro-choice justices are eighty years or older: Williams Brennan, Thurgood Marshall, and Harry Blackmun. Even if Sandra Day O'Connor, a Reagan appointee to the Court who declined to outlaw Roe in the recent case doesn't join the so-called pro-life group, odds are that President Bush should soon appoint another member to the Supreme Court who holds equally reactionary views on the issue of abortion rights.

The battleground on abortion is rapidly shifting to individual states, as state legislators and governors in the 1990 elections will be examined closely by both pro-life and prochoice groups on the abortion issue. Although most prochoice groups are allied with the Democrats, and the pro-lifers tend to be ideological conservatives and Republicans, the division on this controversy isn't strictly partisan. There are millions of white, ethnic Catholics in urban areas, generally working class or blue collar, who are morally opposed to abor-

tions and reject the use of government funds to provide abortions of anyone. Conversely, millions of suburban, upper class whites who are nominal Republicans on fiscal issues also hold liberal views on abortions. They reject the pro-life view that the state has the right to dictate a woman's individual decision regarding abortion. Nationally, most Americans strongly favor a woman's right to a safe abortion, and oppose the arbitrary outlawing of abortions under all conditions.

The abortion issue needs to be addressed within the African American community, in part because pro life groups has consistently distorted the position of blacks as being strongly pro-life. African Americans has experienced a history of being victimized by forced sterilizations and other oppressive strategies to limit or cripple our population, so it is not surprising that most Blacks have political reservations about any involvement of the state in health issues.

What's striking about the abortion debate from the vantagepoint of the Black freedom struggle is the profound ideological inconsistency of the majority of pro-life groups. They demand full legal rights for an embryo, and are willing to set aside the wishes of the pregnant woman, regardless of such factors as poverty, unemployment, the absence of a male spouse or whether pregnancy resulted from rape. Pro-life conservatives frequently don't express any interest in how a nonwhite, pregnant young woman is going to be able to feed, clothe, educate and house a child once it comes into the world. Is it fair or just to impose teenage mothers with such a burden? And given the reductions in federal expenditures for jobs, food stamps, housing and healthcare, the outlawing of legal abortions means the massive expansion of an underclass largely consisting of young, unemployed women of color and small children.

The Black Community has a direct interest in fighting for a woman's right to control her own body, and to preserve the option of safe, legal abortions as a matter of personal choice. To do less would compound the problems of poverty, powerlessness and sexism within our community.

GUEST OPINION

Send Ollie to jail, not to the Black community! A convicted felon has been sentenced, in addition to a three-year suspended prison term and two years' probation, to give 1200 hours of public service working with an anti-drug program in the inner city of Washington, D.C.

Wait a minute. A convicted felon? To counsel Black youth against drugs? Well, just what was this person convicted of?

You know I'm talking about Col. Oliver "Hero" North. His crime? He was convicted for his involvement in the secret sale of U.S. arms to Iran and the illegal diversion of the profits to the Contras ravaging the countryside of Nicaragua.

That means, and he has admitted, that he is a liar. He also is a thief. But is that all? North enthusiastically supported the Contras, not only with these illegal profits, but with his heart and soul. What did the Contras do?

A June 26 article in the THE NATION magazine gives a first hand account of contra activity by quoting excerpts from affidavits obtained by Reed Brody, a former New York State Assistant Attorney General, "who conducted a private fact-finding mission in Nicaragua from September 1984 to January 1985 in which he interviewed 145 victims and witnesses to contra violence against civilians.

Ask yourself if you would want a man to counsel your children who actively supported the following types of behavior.

During a contra attack on the township of El Quayabo, nine people were killed. A 14-year-old girl was raped repeatedly and then decapitated. Three women were forced to lie in the mud while the contras took shots at them, killing one and wounding another. A woman was raped. Christina Borge, a 10-year old, witnessed the killing of two uncles and another woman and was used as target practice: she received four bullet wounds before being left for dead (miraculously, she survived.) Four houses were burned."

Did Col. North work with these contras the way he has been sentenced to work with Black children? What vile, warped brand of patriotism will he be peddling to our black youth under the guise of anti-drug counseling?

Let us not forget that it is a matter of public record that the contras shipped drugs to America which ultimately were sold on the streets in the Black community.


Back to the contras. According to a lay pastor, innocente Peralta, when he found seven people taken in attack on Jinotega cooperative in 1984, this is what he found.

"We found [Juan Perez] assassinated in the mountains. They had tied his hands behind his back. They hung him on a wire fence. They opened up his throat and took out his tongue. Another byonet had gone in through his stomach and come out his back. Finally they cut off his testicles. It was horrible to see."

"Hero" North helped make all of this possible through his illegal dealings and now he is being sent to our youth who already are victims of the brutality of this system.

Were members of the Washington, D.C. Black community consulted about the assignment of this culprit to invade our neighborhood like his contra friends invaded the countryside of Nicaragua?

One good thing could come from this sentence. Maybe while on the streets of the inner city, some wayward drug dealer would drive by and blow Col. North off the face of this planet. I'm sure many mothers and fathers of children tortured at the hands of the contras would say, "Amen."



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