

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Persoealives



More Ways To Go

control function.

by Professor McKinley Burt

Well, here we are at the end of another busy and interesting year, but I am not about winding down here. Last week I spoke of the community's talent bank we had available--the many college graduates, professionals and others who could (and should) be busy at countering the "shrill assault of denigrating media images "which can only stultify and impede the activism and remedial responses of the community to its problems.

We are certainly compelled to congratulate those newly-energized groups of Black men and women who have moved on the issues of youth and gangs, drugs illiteracv, teenage mothers, and family maintenance. But, these are just the initial-albeit scattered-responses to the emotional immediaces prescribed by the establishment media. What is really needed among this new class of Black activists is a specific structuring which will enable them to fully utilize their skills and background in a facile and effective manner. It is important that even before determining goals and objectives, there should come a clear delineation of the playing field. Then, a person or organization is enabled to select areas of participation relevant to specific skills and/or areas of interest.

What kind of a "Playing Field" are we looking at here? There is housing/homelessness, education/literacy, employment/ job development, health/safety, consumer protection, media monitoring, anti-defamation. Now, just for my own writings and manuscripts (and with no staff), I am able to maintain a fairly current and organized information base corresponding to the categories just cited. Therefore it is base corresponding to the categories just cited. Therefore it is no big leap for me to project the idea of a Black-operated urban information center structured along the same lines-computerized and with printouts from the data base available on demand to any and every resident or organization in the community. How else could they intelligently or effectively serve themselves or their constituency?

Given today's level of awareness and demonstrated commitment shown in this community, I cannot see that there should be much difficulty in securing the volunteers required to man such a center. It occurs that, with proper supervision, a number of high school and college students can be used in clipping, sorting and collating media

material in preparation for data entry. I would contemplate that the modicum of expense required for rent, utilities and computer/peripheral rentals could be financed through monthly assessments of individuals and organizations. It may even be possible to have the premises donated; the same with some of the other costs. I have reservations about accepting help from many of the governmental agencies; this is because I have found through experience that most of what they describe as a monitoring or reporting process is in reality a

Now, in any system which is designed to collect information that is to be used in an applications environment, it will soon become apparent that there are informational needs beyond the naked data. You must have manuals and reference books to guide you in the effective application of the data to the specific area of relevancy. Otherwise the information is like an unsorted hand of cards; you must have a library. Let me provide you with a model. In the early 1970's I maintained an office where, under contract to Model Cities (Charles Jordan) and the Albina Contractors Association, I provided fiscal management and business assistance services to large and small community corporations--the total cash flow was close to a quarter-million dollars a month. Because of my establishment, real world experience I had available the type of library necessary to conduct procedures in a productive and accurate manner.

To my surprise and consternation, though, I found that I was being besieged by the personnel (and clients) of neighboring Black-operated programs who were trying to operate without libraries. Since I was dealing with every type of business and social enterprise, my shelves were crowded with hundreds of volumes pertaining to the operation of the entire spectrum of these entities. Not only were there the standard texts, but I had materials from wet and dry leasing of vehicles to the various industrial classification manuals and four types of Dictionaries of Occupational Titles. There was also the individual Trade or Professional Association material. I was not a carpenter without tools. The same applies today if Blacks are to be able to use the data bases made available to them. That is if there is going to be an effective process of improving our quality of life in the aforementioned areas of housing, health, education and so forth; old Massa is not going to do it for us. That has been made evident.

"Post-Black Politics? The Election Of Wilder And Dinkins"

Part One of a Two Part Series

Last month's elections of Douglas Wilder as Governor of Virginia and David Dinkins as Mayor of New York City represent a turning point in national Black political history. In the quarter century since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed, most Black elected officials have gained office from Congressional or state legislative districts which are predominately African-American. Few Blacks seeking office ever earned more than 25 percent of the white electorate's vote. An "invisible ceiling" within the electoral system limited the mobility of talented women and men, seemingly denying them access to effective positions of power within the larger soci-

Although Wilder''s margin of victory was far smaller than polls had indicated, and Dinkins failed to win majorities in white, traditionally Democratic constituencies, the two politicians successfully broke through the invisible ceiling. By reviewing their political histories, its possible to understand the reasons for their respective victories, as well as the problems each will encounter immediately upon assuming office.

David Dinkins and Douglas Wilder are the products of the civil rights era, entering politics during the maelstrom of change initiated by the mass desegregation campaigns across the South in the 1960s. Wilder was a liberal Democratic attorney who made a living defending the poor and victims of police brutality. In his initial campaign for the Virginia State Senate twenty years ago, he had an Afro hairstyle and employed the political rhetoric of Black Power. Dinkins was also a liberal ideologically and politically, developing close relations with the city's powerful public employees unions, the liberal-left intelligentsia, and Black middle class reformers in Harlem and throughout the city.

And from the beginning, Dinkins cultivated cordial links with New York's influential Jewish community, lending his backing to Jewish causes, speaking out against anti-semitism, and defending the federal government's financial and political support for Israel. Dinkins took pains to denounce Black nationalist leader Louis Farrakhan, and repeatedly took the initiative to resolve tensions between the African-American community and an upper middle class Jewish constituency which was growing increasingly conservative politically.

Like many politicians with extensive ties to organized labor and Democratic urban organizations, Dinkins was not without flaws. Almost two decades ago, Dinkins failed to file his income tax returns for several years, which he eventually paid. There were questions concerning the value of communications company stock he sold to his son to avoid conflict of interest

charges when he was elected Manhattan Borough President. But compared to most of the politicians who had emerged from the city's corrupt institutions, Dinkins's personal history and professional record was better than average.

Wilder"s record of personal conduct, by contrast, was largely unblemished. However, he had a very different problem. During the 1970s, Wilder's political ambitions began to target the then-unlikely goal of achieving the state's governorship. To do so, Wilder recognized he would have to remake himself into the traditional image of the classical, Southern patriarch - conservative, button-down, pro-business, anticrime, and abundantly safe. He couldn't cross the color line personally, but he would do so in terms of his political image. Wilder sought to become a Southern version of Los Angeles Mayor Thomas Bradley, a moderately conservative politician who was "post-Black"--beyond identification with race. Wilder reversed his opposition to the death penalty. He backed away from his earlier advocacy of granting the District of Columbia full statehood rights, which in effect would place two African-Americans into the U.S. Senate. Hoving away form liberal Keynesianism in economic policy, Wilder opposed any changes in Virginia's rigid "right to work" laws, which prohibit compulsory membership in unions within individual businesses.

After four terms in Virginia's Senate, Wilder was successfully elected Lieutenant Governor, the state's second highest office in 1985. Almost immediately speculation began concerning Wilder"s chances for election as governor, since Virginia prohibits incumbent governors from seeking re-election. One of Wilder's chief difficulties was maintaining his natural base among the African-American electorate, which had strongly supported the insurgent presidential campaigns of Jesse Jackson in both 1984 and 1988, while reassuring white voters that he was just as conservative and pro-business as any Southern white politician. Wilder placed each foot within tow dramatically divergent political cultures. recognizing that both were necessary for him to achieve his goal. He praised Jackson personally, but took pains to distinguish the charismatic campaigner's liberal-left agenda from his own. He diffused the critics by suggesting, somewhat falsely, that Jackson's electoral mobilization represented symbolism without substance. "Jesse runs to inspire," Wilder observed, "I run to win."

There was a fundamental difference between the Wilder and Dinkins campaigns vs. the dynamic electoral mobilization of Harold Washington in Chicago in 1983 and 1987. In the later case, African-Americans used the electoral process to reject the

"plantation-style politics" of a corrupt and racist Democratic Machine. They used the system to protest against institutional racism, economic discrimination and political powerlessness. But in the Wilder-Dinkins strategy, the agenda of African-Americans was not on central stage. Both candidates, especially Wilder, ran "post-black" campaigns, recognizing that the African-American electorate had no where else to go to express its political objectives.

Both politicians had recognized years ago that their Black electorates were too small to provide the entire core for successful bids to high office. Over a decade, they cultivated political records which would place them well within the moderate mainstreams of their respective political cultures in order to appeal to white liberal-tocentrist constituencies. Rather than denying race, both sought to "transcend" the color line, offering generous platitudes of how racism had supposedly declined in significance during the 1980s. The problem with this perspective is that all the evidence suggests that white voters still remain highly race conscious far more so than African-Americans or Latinos. In hundreds of elections across the U.S., when white Democratic voters have been faced with a choice between a Black Democrat who espouses their views and class interests.

VANTAGE POINT

Articles and Essays by Ron Daniels

Peace On Earth Goodwill Towards Humanity

December and January are months filled with religious and spiritual holidays and celebrations which tend to cause us to pause to contemplate the current circumstance and destiny of humanity. From Ramadan to Hanukkah from Christmas to Kwanzaa this is a season of celebration and reflection on the planet earth. With a world torn by strife and turmoil this season is generally marked by a momentary calming of conflict and a temporary reduction of tensions.

It is difficult to imagine that somehow deep down inside the bosoms of the vast majority of human beings there is not a hunger for peace. From Northern Ireland, to the middle East from Central America to South Africa, from Bensonhurst to Miami most human beings are decent people who yearn for stability, quietude and peace. Most follow a religions or creeds which upholds moral values like love, justice, devotion to family and respect for human-

Why then is the world in such a tumultuous state? The problem seems to be the difficult leap from belief to practice, from lip service to daily living - translating ideas into a living, breathing and meaningful reality. Peace and prejudice are incompatible. Extremes of wealth and poverty, vast disparities in peoples access to opportunity, surrender to racism, sexism, religious bigotry and cultural chauvinism all breed tension, hatred, violence and war.

As we pause to celebrate and reflect during this season we need to recognize that there can be no permanent peace without

justice. The ultimate vision of an "age of Aquarius" is not possible unless we resolve to heed the admonition to feed the hungry, to cloth the naked, to loose the prisoners, to turn swords into ploughshares.

The recent meeting of Bush and Gorbachev at the Malta Summit seem to hold out new promise that a world which has been burdened by the adverse effects of a cold war and a maddening, insane arms race may now be on the brink of a new era where the resources of the great powers can now be used to convert guns into butter. The prospect and promise of such an era can only be realized if the overwhelming majority of the citizens of our global village our committed to the triumph of good over

What Albert Schweitzer called the spiritual and ethical forces of progress must come to guide and lead the material forces of progress. This is essentially the message that the "Prince of Peace" came to bring a strife torn world nearly 2,000 years ago. Our world is still waiting for us to convert our basic instincts of decency and kindness into a daily ethic that can rescue humanity

from misery and turmoil. The relative interlude of tranquility during this season is a great source of optimism. For it suggests that peace is attainable. We must keep striving and struggling to bring it to fruition. If we listen, learn and live out the multiple meanings of the positive messages of this season then indeed peace on earth good will towards humanity is possible.



Christmas, 1989

Christmas is the season to set aside the troubles of daily life and dwell on the good things that we can be thankful for while praying for the strength to overcome the

But it should be more than that. And it should be more than a binge of consumerism and gift-giving that is too often just a mindless display of wealth and restless-

Christmas should be a time of rededication to the ideals that must motivate us all year round--ideals like peace on earth,

universal brotherhood and ending poverty. For while we count our blessings, we must also remember those who have too

few blessings to count. We live in a nation that includes over 30 million people, most of them children, who are poor. We live in a world in which

nearly a billion people go to bed hungry every night. Surely, the Christmas message means caring for those who have less, for those whose lives have not been blessed with the fruits of our society, for those who need

help to climb up to more fulfilling lives.

At every family gathering in this season of celebration, there are ghosts at the table reminding us that all is not well in America today and that we need to transcend personal concerns by rededicating ourselves to the ideals of the Christmas

I'm thinking of such reminders of the need to act as the many homeless for whom Christmas is not a day of celebration but another day of humiliation and struggle for

I'm thinking of poor children for whom Christmas is not a day of unwrapping expensive gifts, but of wondering why they are cold and hungry.

And I'm thing of the many others so

often ignored by our society, such as AIDS sufferers, the jobless, the uneducated who can't compete in this economy any more.

We need to make them part of our Christmas, too, for the meaning of the season is that we all one, and that what hurts

It's a meaning based on religious and moral principles that have stood the test of time and of the ages, but it is also an expression of the truth that we are all vul-

Each of us may become ill, lose a job, be shattered by crime, by drugs, or other scourges of our society. And most assuredly, each of us will become vulnerable to the inroads of age.

This season also witnesses the inspiring revolution sweeping across the communist world, as people are rising up against their rulers and demanding the rights we Americans have so long taken for granted.

That too, is an apt reminder of the blessings we enjoy. No matter how hard our condition, no matter how harmed we are by the effects of bad public policies and evil discrimination, we live in a land where we can freely protest and can organize to change conditions for the better.

And that too, is an indispensable part of what I call rededicating ourselves to the Christmas spirit of brotherhood and the oneness of humanity.

For redidication is not simply saying "isn't it a shame" when confronted with the inequalities and injustices in our society. It is a resolve to do something to change them, and to help our society to overcome the poverty and racism that are sins against the spirit of the Christ whose birth we

May you have a joyous Christmas and may you share your blessings with others and work to make our society the shining light it can be.

Civil Rights Journal by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Southern Conference Movement: 50 Years of Struggle

December 1989 marked the 51st anniversary of the founding of the "Southern Conference Movement' for racial and economic justice which was initiated in Birmingham, Alabama. The history of the freedom and justice movements in this nation is extremely important. We must not allow this history to get lost.

It was in 1938 that 1,500 people from across the South, African-American and Anglo-American, dared to come to the heart of Dixieland to form a multi-racial social action, regional organization known as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW). At the time of this meeting, Birmingham was a literal racist police state which forbade under the law African-Americans and Anglo-American form even being in the same room together no matter what the purpose or auspices of the gathering. There were many labor organizers who also dared to attend the founding meeting of Southern Conference for Human Welfare. This organization mobilized around the quest for a true democracy in the South by challenging the vestiges of Jim Crow

Out of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare movement, grew the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) in 1948 which worked for over 25 years in the deep South to bring movement activists together to support "people's movements" in the South for racial, labor and human rights. One of the important historical understandings of the freedom movement in this country has been the "continuity" of the evolution of multi-racial coalitions known by many different names, but maintaining the basic principle of "grass roots organizing as the fundamental means of challenging and transforming American

society for social, racial and economic justice."

When the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was established in Raleigh, North Carolina in the 1960s, the Southern Conference Educational Fund was one of the main Southwide multi-racial coalitions that openly supported SNCC financially and politically. Names of leaders like Joe Gelders, Jim Dombrowski, Aubrey Williams, Carl and Anne Braden, and Fred Shuttleworth were important forces that forged an essential part of the foundation of the evolution of the Southern freedom movement.

Recently, in Birmingham, Ossie Davis rendered an emotional and captivating tribute ceremony to all of those who had worked hard during the last 50 years in the South to keep the movement alive. From Ella Baker to Rose Parks, from Martin Luther King, Jr., to Fannie Lou Hamer to Mojeska Simpkins to Virginia Derr and from many, many others the legacy of the struggle in the South is one of caring and sacrifice, of joy and struggle and of winning people's victories for justice and human freedom.

While the list of all of the names of the persons who have given themselves to the struggle in the South is much too long to mention here, it is important that we pause to salute the thousands of named and unnamed persons who have participated in the various struggles in the Southland of this nation. If there is to be a new South and if there is to be a new nation where economic and racial justice are realities for all citizens then the one thing we have already learned is that the struggle must continue. And the struggle can only continue effectively to the extent to which multi-racial and multi-generational grass roots movements are organized, maintained and mobi-

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