

NATIONAL FORUM

Along The Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable

Glory: Black History and Struggle

The history of Black America has always been, fundamentally, a struggle to be free. Enslavement and racial oppression were more than physical restrictions and the use of coercion against a people. Domination could only be achieved when the mind and spirit, as well as the body, was controlled and broken. More than a century ago, the slaves came to understand that their freedom could only be achieved if assumed an active role in the struggle to liberate themselves, mentally and physically. Freedom handed down from above to the oppressed, is not freedom at all. Freedom is only real when the oppressed themselves, through their own initiative and inner strength, shatter the chains of bondage.

This is the central message of "Glory," a historical drama depicting the ordeals of a Black regiment which fought during the height of the Civil War. The film is based partially on the actual letters of Union Army colonel Robert Gould Shaw (played by Matthew Broderick), who trained and led the Massachusetts 54th Regiment in a devastating assault on Fort Wagner, South

Carolina, in July, 1863. The son of wealthy abolitionists, Shaw was convinced that African-American troops, if properly trained and equipped, could exceed the performance of white Northern troops. As the film unfolds, there is a synthesis of sorts between this abolitionist-inspired belief in the equality of Blacks and whites, with the African-American desire to strike a personal and collective blow against the evils of slavery.

The wisest decision of "Glory" director Edward Zwick was to focus the heart of the film not on Broderick's character, but instead on four fictional Black men, who are used to represent the divergent personalities within the 54th Regiment. Denzel Washington portrays a Nat Turner/Malcolm X styled character, a Black man whose back has been bloodied many times by the slaveholder's lash, who fights in order to settle scores. Morgan Freeman plays the regimental sergeant, a former gravedigger who fights because of his willingness "to die for freedom." Jihmi Kennedy portrays a rural and illiterate ex-slave, but a crack

shot and screen newcomer Andre Braugher does an excellent job as a New England educated, middle class Black man, who finds his roots and identity by bonding with his fellow Black soldiers. The device permits a largely white audience to see both the diversity and humanity among the African-American soldiers, who have volunteered into the Union Army in order to liberate their brethren in the South, as well as themselves. Through the ordeal of conflict, in battle against white slaveholder officers, the Black soldiers become active participants in the struggle for freedom.

This is not to suggest that "Glory" holds up to historical examination. As American films go, it is generally very good, particularly the detailed accuracy of the battle sequences. However, it is short of the mark within the framework of Black social history.

"Glory" provides many examples of white racism within the ranks of Northern troops and officers, who refused to accept the idea of Black men carrying guns. But this racism within the military was simply a reflection of bigotry within the entire Northern society and political establishment as a whole. Lincoln didn't free the slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation as a humanitarian gesture, but solely as a military decision to disrupt the South's labor supply. The war was widely unpopular among white Northern workers, and they targeted their grievances by making Blacks scapegoats. On July 13, 1863, only days before the galant and bloody assault by Black troops on Fort Wagner, the white working class in New York City rioted against the city's Black population. Hundreds of people, mostly women and children, were killed; thousands more were left

homeless. For Black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet, who was nearly killed in the race riot, these were "dark and terrible days."

One of "Glory's" most moving sequences which depicts Black troops rejecting discriminatory wages beneath those of white soldiers is also historically accurate, but insufficient. The Enlistment Act of July, 1862, had set the pay scale for white privates at \$13 per month vs. \$7 per month for Black privates. The 54th Massachusetts Regiment refused any pay for more than a year, and the policy of discriminatory wages was finally reversed in 1864. However, many other Black troops protested the policy as well. In the third South Carolina all-Black regiment, sergeant William Walker mobilized his fellow soldiers, stacking their rifles and refused to fight under Jim Crow wages. Predictably, Walker was court martialled and shot.

Finally, "Glory" gives the audience the false sense that Black troops were an exception to the rule in Civil War combat. Actually, a total of 180,000 Blacks fought in the Union Army by the end of the war. More than 38,000 died, a 40 percent higher casualty rate than for white Northern troops. Blacks fought in over two hundred fifty separate engagements, beginning as early as the fall of 1862. There were also scores of Black officers, including abolitionists Major Martin R. Delany and Captain P.B.S. Pinchback. Ex-slaves, both women and men, worked as spies behind Confederate army lines. African-Americans, civilians and soldiers alike, were not passive witnesses in the struggle for freedom. Despite these weaknesses, "Glory" makes a substantial contribution to our awareness of the role of African-Americans in the conflict to abolish human bondage.

VANTAGE POINT

Articles and Essays by Ron Daniels

Pan-Africanism: Is It An Idea Whose Time Has Come . . . Again?

In portraying the reaction to the release of Nelson Mandela, a national network television broadcast captured the Rev. Calvin Butts, the brilliant, progressive, young pastor of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church, speaking from his pulpit in the heart of Harlem. In expressing his joy that Mandela was now out of captivity, Rev. Butts said "We are an African people," whatever affects African people anywhere, affects African people everywhere. Rev. Butts was thus upholding the philosophy and principles of pan-Africanism: the concept that African people throughout the world must unite and work together for the development of our African homeland as a basis for the development and progress of African people throughout the world.

The concept of pan-Africanism has been a constant current within the stream of Black political thought in America. It did not take long for the idea to emerge from among the captive sons and daughters of Africa in America, that America was a hostile territory where African people were unwelcome except as slaves. Despite the ruthless attempt to brainwash and de-Africanize African people in America, a craving for Africa persisted in the hearts and minds of at least some of the people of African descent in this country.

Martin R. Delany, Wilmot S. Blyden and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner were among the 19th century African-American leaders who extolled the virtues of ancient African culture and civilization and articulated visions of what Blyden called "Pan-Negroism" as a strategy to empower and restore Black people to their position of historical greatness on the world stage. In the early 20th century W.E.B. DuBois actually convened a series of pan-African conferences and congresses where African people from around the world discussed the current situation and focused on the future prospects for Africa and the race. And of course pan-Africanism was the cornerstone of the philosophy and movement of Marcus Garvey who emphatically proclaimed: "Europe for the Europeans, Asia for the Asians and Africa for the Africans at home and abroad."

In the latter half of this century it was Malcolm X who stood apart from the civil rights leaders in stressing the pan-African and international dimensions of the struggle of African people in America. Malcolm constantly reminded us that we might be a minority in America, but that we are a

majority in the world. For those who ridiculed the idea of identifying with Africa, Malcolm bristled "why you left your mind in Africa." On the African continent, it was Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, President of Ghana, who most forcefully projected the vision and ideology of African unity and pan-Africanism as vehicles for the liberation, empowerment and development of Africa and the African diaspora.

With the call to Black Power, Black consciousness and nationalism in the '60s and '70s pan-Africanism gained a certain currency and popularity among movement activists. Leaders like Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) of SNCC, Jimmy Garrett of the Center for Black Education, Owusu Sadaukai (Howard Fuller) of Malcolm X Liberation University, Imamu Amiri Baraka of the congress of African People and countless others pressed pan-Africanism and the concept that "we are an African people" to the forefront of the Black liberation movement. There was a genuine belief during this period that pan-Africanism was essential to the survival and progress of African people in Africa, America and throughout the diaspora.

This upsurge of pan-Africanism produced organized efforts to provide political and material support for Africa. Organizations like Pan-African Skills successfully convinced skilled African-Americans to lend assistance to various initiatives, institutions and enterprises in Africa. The Southern African Support Project (SASP) was also organized to provide concrete material support for projects in southern Africa.

On the political front, boycotts were directed at U.S. corporations doing business in southern Africa like Gulf Oil (Angola) and Polaroid (South Africa). The Gulf boycott, which was spearheaded by a young man named Randall Robinson, had a great impact. Of course Randall Robinson would later become the Executive Director of TransAfrica. This influential lobby for Africa and the Caribbean can also be said to be a product of this period of pan-Africanist ascendancy. Last but not least African Liberation Day, as an African-American focal point for education and political mobilization around Africa, was first organized in 1972. I can still hear Owusu Sadaukai closing his address to the crowd of 35,000 people in Washington, D.C. hammering home the words "We are an African People."

Perspectives



More African-American Contributions To Technology

by Professor McKinley Burt

At the request of several teachers we interrupted this series last week to reprint the article on Russia's famed African poet, Alexander Pushkin, whose statue looks down upon the new McDonald's fast food restaurant in Moscow.

Annie Easley: This prolific mathematician develops and implements computer codes used in solar, wind and other energy applications. She has made major contributions in research and management at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. A native of Birmingham, Alabama, her expertise is in identifying energy conversion systems that offer the greatest improvement over commercially available systems.

James Harris: When this nuclear chemist joined the scientific team at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, it was not imagined that within a few short years he would be honored as co-discoverer of two new chemical elements—Element 104 (Rutherfordium), and Element 105 (Hahnium). These discoveries are among the most important in science this century.

Dr. William A. Brown: In the fashion of "Imhotep", chief Architect and Pyramid Builder for Egyptian King Zoser (Third Dynasty), this black architect is responsible for "all" Air Force facilities design and construction around the world. A specialist in "mathematical criteria" in building standards, he heads the Air Force construction staff at the Pentagon.

Dr. George R. Caruthers: This Black astrophysicist has made many major contributions to "Space Astronomy". His design of the Apollo 16 "Far Ultraviolet camera/Spectrograph" "is the most significant single contribution to the program." At age 25 he was granted Patent No. 3,478,216 (Nov., 1969) for an "Image Converter for detecting electromagnetic radiation." This in-

ventor-engineer has 63 publications in the areas of electronic astronomy, aerodynamics, upper air physics, etc.

Dr. Patricia Davis, C.P.A. and mathematics and statistics major at Stanford University, is a vice-president and 'head of Bank Of America's World Banking Division's Systems Financial Services Group'. Her job has the exact same relationship to the firm as was that of the Vizer or Chief Minister to the Pharaohs of the middle Egyptian dynasties.

Dr. Isaac Gilliam IV: This supervisor for N.A.S.A. "Space Shuttle Operations" has the official title, "Director, Dryden Flight Research Center." He is the person most responsible for America's technical advancement in many areas of sophisticated transportation modes as involved in space exploration.

Brigadier General Dr. David M. Hall: A logistics mathematician, Dr. Hall manages "billions" of dollars of data processing equipment and an 18.8 overall billion dollar budget for the U.S. Air Force. The overwhelming magnitude of his financial responsibilities can be seen in the context that he manages more monies than is the entire national budget for over one-hundred individual countries.

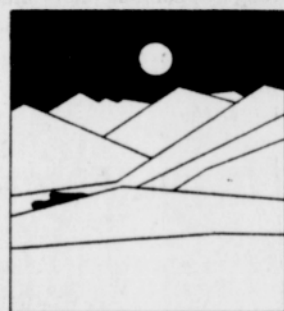
Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson: This 'theoretical physicist' was the first Black woman to receive a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A member of the MIT Corporation and . . . the school's Board of Trustees, Dr. Jackson now specializes in solid or condensed state physics. Now a researcher for the Bell System Labs, she uses computers, imagination and sophisticated mathematics to explain the behavior of physical systems on the microscopic level. She has also been associated with the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, and has served as a visiting scientist at the European Organization For Nuclear Research.



To Be Equal

by John E. Jacob

A New South Africa?



South Africa appears to be joining the worldwide parade of countries abandoning unworkable, dictatorial systems to experiment with democracy.

But unlike many of the countries of the eastern bloc, it is not revolutionizing its system; merely agreeing to create preconditions that will allow further change to occur.

That's a long way from the euphoric pronouncements that greeted the release of Nelson Mandela from the jail where the racist South African government held him for 27 years.

Nelson Mandela was released for reasons that suggest further pressure will be necessary to destroy the apartheid system.

One reason for his release was the realization that continuing along the path of white domination in a nation where whites are a small minority is a prescription for suicide.

South Africa's leaders correctly perceived that they are in a no-win situation, and that the slow deterioration of the country's economy and its standing in the world could only snowball into complete collapse.

A second reason was the effects of the sanctions.

Many opponents of sanctions argued that the stubborn South Africans would never give up their system, so bans on trade or other economic pressures were futile.

They also said that American companies would simply be replaced by foreign companies with fewer scruples, and that the only real victims of the sanctions would be Blacks denied the opportunity to work for American companies with more enlightened policies.

However persuasive such arguments were, common sense suggested that if you deliver body blows to a country's economy, its people will begin to question the need for sacrifice and ultimately change the system that causes the sanctions.

And that is exactly what happened. Moderate South Africans were faced with a choice: either change the apartheid

system or become an economic basket case. Not surprisingly, they're choosing the former route.

Finally, Mr. Mandela was released because Black South Africans refused to compromise with an evil system, continued to support their organizations that were at war with apartheid, and kept up the pressure for change.

All of these reasons suggest that the release of Mr. Mandela is just the beginning; the spark leading to the total collapse of apartheid.

But only if the three factors continue to be in force.

White South Africans must be made to see this is no viable alternative to dismantling the system of racial domination. Black South Africans must continue to keep up the pressure. And foreign nations and companies must keep the sanctions in place until there's a final resolution of the issues.

To his credit, President Bush has said that our sanctions would remain in force until change is established, not simply talked about.

South Africa's President De Klerk is working to convince his countrymen that apartheid must go and appears to be anxious to enter into serious negotiations with Black leadership to reach a consensus on a new system that treats all groups fairly.

As for black resolve to continue to press for freedom, that is obvious. As Mr. Mandela said in his first words as a free man:

"We have waited too long for our freedom, and we can wait no longer. Now is the time to intensify the struggle."

Mr. Mandela has proved himself a man of dignity and extraordinary ability whose presence provides South Africans of all races with leadership that can usher in a new era for that sad nation.

At present, he has been released from one prison into another, larger prison. For that is what his country is for: the Black majority. With continued pressure from without and from within, today's prison can be transformed into tomorrow's garden.

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