

NATIONAL FORUM



VANTAGE POINT

Articles and Essays by Ron Daniels



Along the Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable

Hundreds Jam Harlem Church In Tribute to Malcolm X

The National We Remember Malcolm observance held on February 21 at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem will be noted as one of the great events of our history in this century. Twenty-five years after the assassination of El Hajj Malik el Shabazz, the hundreds who gathered at this historic Harlem church bore witness to the remarkable resurrection to relevance of Malcolm X. The church which Adam Clayton Powell had pastored and where he had invited Malcolm, the Muslim Minister to speak was jammed to capacity with a standing room only audience of nearly 2,500 people. Another 600 people were crowded against the doorways outside, eager and anxious to pay their respects to and honor their fallen/risen hero, Malcolm X. February 21, 1990 was a great day in our history.

At about 7:00 p.m. Dr. Betty Shabazz, "Sister Betty" rose from a front row seat in the audience to take her place on the dais. The sanctuary erupted in a thunderous and sustained standing ovation for this strong African woman who has devoted her life to raising six children and vigorously interpreting, protecting and defending the life and legacy of her husband, El Hajj Malik el Shabazz.

In his welcome remarks Rev. Calvin O. Butts, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church and a worthy successor to Adam Clayton Powell, reminded the audience that 25 years ago, there was serious difficulty locating a church that would even accept Malcolm's body for the funeral services. But on this night, Rev. Butts made it crystal clear that Sister Betty, the family and the friends and devotees of Malcolm were welcome at Abyssinian Baptist Church... Sister Dona Maremba Richards poured libations and invited the spirit of Malcolm to join the congregation... The choir led the singing

of the Black National Anthem followed by God Bless Africa...

Then Dr. James Turner, the peerless political analyst, scholar, social activist and unapologetic disciple of Malcolm moved to the podium. Staring straight into the array of cameras assembled by various representatives of the local, national and international media, in a firm voice he, the Coordinator of the National Malcolm X Commemoration commission, proclaimed to the world, "we are here to set the record straight. We have never ever forgotten Malcolm X." The audience exploded into a roaring ovation at the sound of this electrifying affirmation.

There were so many highlights during this great evening. There were testimonials by Imam Siraj Wahhaj of Brooklyn, Rep. Al Vann, President of the New York State Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus, rap artists Chuckie Dee of Public Enemy and Dougie Fresh and community activist Lisa Williamson. Haki Madhubuti and Sonia Sanchez, two of our finest and most consistent poets and political activists read magnificent pieces for the occasion.

One of the most moving testimonials however, came from Percy Sutton, former Manhattan Burroughs President, and President of the Inner City Broadcasting Co. which operates the Apollo Theater and the powerful W.L.I.B. radio station. Standing tall and erect at the podium, one of the most powerful Black men in America today reflected on how he had repeatedly failed in his numerous quests for public office until he went to Malcolm X and asked for his endorsement. Mr. Sutton recounted how Malcolm, who had previously not been inclined to become involved in electoral politics, had given him his blessing. Armed with Malcolm's endorsement and all of the enormous influence that went with it, Percy

Sutton was elected to the New York State Assembly. By his own admission, this began his rise to influence in politics and subsequent access to the corridors of economic power. In a voice filled with conviction and emotion Mr. Sutton said "if there had been no Malcolm X, there would be no Inner City Broadcasting Co., no W.L.I.B., WDAS, and there would be no Apollo Theater."

As the evening approached its climax Rev. Ben Chavis presented the eulogy delivered by Ossie Davis at Malcolm's funeral twenty-five years ago. Concluding the eulogy with his own benediction, Ben Chavis compared "our black shining Prince" to Jesus Christ who suffered, bled and died so that we might live. He challenged us to let Malcolm's light shine in our daily lives. He closed with "God Bless Malcolm X." It was a fitting close to a remarkable historical event. As I indicated in my brief remarks on this occasion, February 21, was not the end, but the beginning. The celebration of the life, the Legacy, the Lessons of Malcolm X will be consummated on May 19, Malcolm's birthday, when the African-American Progressive Action Network and the National Malcolm X Commemoration Commission proclaim May 19, National Malcolm X Day in a national ceremony in Omaha, Nebraska (Malcolm's birthplace). The National Commission is hopeful that representatives from African-American communities all across the country will send delegations to Omaha in addition to holding proclamation ceremonies in their own local communities on May 19.

May 19, will be another great day in 1990 the YEAR OF MALCOLM X. Malcolm lives!

For further information about the May 19 National Malcolm X Day events, please write to Dr. Deborah Robinson, P.O. Box 11174, Washington, D.C. 20008.

W.E.B. Du Bois, the founder of the NAACP and noted Black scholar, observed prophetically in 1900: "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line." Du Bois meant by this observation that the world seemed to be divided between a powerful, industrialized, white minority, in Europe and the United States, and a powerless and exploited nonwhite majority, the colonized people of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. By 1900, Africa had been divided between Great Britain, France, imperial Germany and Portugal. Queen Victoria was empress of India, and as the jingoists proclaimed,

mountains. Native Americans who had once roamed across the great plains were now isolated and confined to reservations. Their treaties with the American government--which had promised to protect their rights to the land--were repeatedly violated and eventually ignored. At Wounded Knee, hundreds were murdered, as an example to the others. For Du Bois, who witnessed this destruction of the cultures, institutions and integrity of people of color, the world seemed fundamentally fractured. Racism, colonialism, and economic exploitation confined nonwhites behind a color line. Democracy could never be achieved, Du Bois argued,

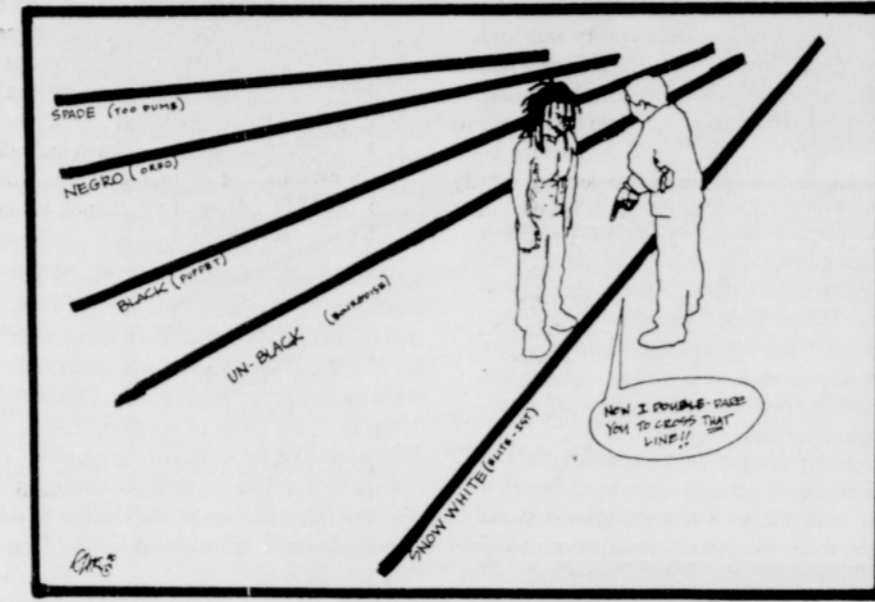
be the ninth most productive state in the world.

In South Africa, the brutal veil of apartheid appears to be gradually lifting. Across Asia and Africa, dozens of states escaped the yoke of colonialism and developed governments of their own. In Eastern Europe, the repressive regimes of Stalinist communism have finally collapsed, creating the possibility of establishing truly democratic institutions. Increasingly, the prospect of peace for the future of the world seems achievable.

But from a Du Boisian perspective, the resolution of various political conflicts across the globe have not addressed a fundamental contradiction, which threatens to create new and potentially bitter divisions between people and societies in the future. Increasingly, it is clear that the world of the twenty first century will not be divided into two hostile and antagonistic camps of capitalism vs. communism. The Soviet state under Gorbachev's policy of restructuring, or perestroika, is moving gradually to a multi-party political system, and an economic order which permits the existence of private enterprise.

The major disputes at a global level will occur between the industrialized, technologically advanced Euro-American west vs. the largely nonwhite, impoverished, technologically backward Third World. And within many western states, a two-tiered social order is emerging, pitting the interests of domestic minorities, Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and others, against the continued power and privilege of the white upper middle class and more affluent elites. In short, the problem of the twenty first century is the problem of the new color line.

In the Netherlands, a color line has emerged with the growth of substantial numbers of minorities from Curacao, Turkey, Indonesia, and Surinam. In the United Kingdom, an explosive situation exists with the presence of three million Africans, Asians, and Caribbean Blacks in major cities. A debate over the issue of whether Chinese from Hong Kong should be admitted into the country as British citizens threatens to escalate into a major racist movement led by the Conservative Party to target people of color domestically. In France, in the past decade, there has been the growth of violent neofascist movement, largely in opposition to the spiraling nonwhite population of Algerians, Blacks from Francophone Africa and the Caribbean, and who now live in Paris, Marseilles, and other cities.



"The Sun Never set on the British Empire." In 1900, Portugal still relied on slave labor to clear the lands for its plantations in Angola and Mozambique. The Belgians under Leopold had slaughtered more than one million Africans in the Congo, and many more would perish before the granting of independence in 1960. In the Caribbean, the British Colonial Office had outlawed trade unions; Blacks had no direct or indirect representation within the political system. And in the great bastion of democracy, the United States, the aftermath of reconstruction had degenerated into the long travail of Jim Crow segregation. Blacks had been outlawed from serving on juries. More than one hundred African-Americans were the victims of lynching every year. Black males were denied the right to vote, and were frequently arrested or murdered for expressing their political opinions. In the west, thousands of Chinese laborers were the victims of brutal exploitation in the construction of railroads across the

so long as this division of inequality existed throughout the world.

As we stand at the end of the twentieth century, assessing where we have travelled, and where history seems to be taking us, we may feel a tremendous sense of optimism. The most overt forms of racial domination and political tyranny appear to be receding. Jim Crow segregation in the United States has been legally outlawed for more than a quarter century. Through the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and thousands of others who participated in the civil rights movement, the most overt forms of racial discrimination were abolished. A black middle class developed and expanded. The number of black elected officials increased from 104 in 1964 to over 6,700 by 1990. The gross annual receipts for African American owned businesses soared from \$30 billion to over \$200 billion. If Black America was judged as a separate nation by its gross domestic product today, it would

Hard-Hitting Issues On Black Mayors' Agenda

ATLANTA, GA.--In 1974, a handful of Black mayors organized the Southern Conference of Black Mayors to address problems of exclusion and access for newly-elected officials in the South. Shortly after its formation, the name was changed to the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc. (NCBM) after mayors from the Mid-west requested membership.

Sixteen years later, NCBM reports that many barriers have disappeared, the number of Black mayors has increased dramatically, but Black-managed cities and towns are still plagued with racial inequities, escalating drug and substance abuse, and the

challenge of mainstreaming African-Americans economically.

These and other topics will receive high priority on the organization's agenda for its 16th Annual Convention in New Orleans at the Clarion Hotel on April 4-7, 1990. Revolving around the theme, AN NEW DECADENCE: A NEW VISION FOR THE '90s, workshops and other sessions will cover topics ranging from solid waste management to delivering campaign promises.

Most of NCBM's 316 members are expected to be in attendance, including several newly-elected Black mayors from cities such as New York, Seattle, Cleveland, and New

Haven. Representatives of the Bush administration, educators, other elected officials, community leaders, and corporate executives are also scheduled to attend.

NCBM is a non-profit, nonpolitical, nonpartisan organization that provides management and technical assistance to its members who represent primarily small and rural municipalities.

At a press conference in Compton, California earlier this month, NCBM's president, Mayor James L. Usry of Atlantic City, New Jersey, pointed out "the nation's Black mayors are optimistic about the decade of the '90s and beyond, as our convention theme suggests."

Rainbow Lobby Steps Up Campaign To Make News Election Service More Democratic

The Washington, D.C.-based Rainbow Lobby has stepped up its campaign against the undemocratic practices of the News Election Service (NES), the entity created by a consortium of the country's major television networks and the wire services to collect and tabulate election results.

The Lobby first challenged the NES in November, 1989 for its failure to report accurately the election results in the predominantly Black and Puerto Rican 11th Councilmanic district of New York City, where--despite the fact that 42% of the vote went to the independent New Alliance Party candidate for City Council, Pedro Espada--only the vote counts of the Democratic Party and Conservative Party candidates were reported.

The campaign being waged by the Rainbow Lobby, which advocates for fair elections and democracy in this country and around the world, has two thrusts: it is urging the NES to change its policies, which unfairly discriminate against independents, and it is calling for an investigation by the Justice Department into the NES' activities.

The Lobby's call for a Justice Department investigation is based on evidence that the NES is in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. The NES constitutes an agreement among the television networks and wire services--which would normally be prohibited by antitrust laws--that they will not compete with each other in the collection of election results. In 1966 the Justice Department agreed to exempt the NES from prosecution under these laws--with the stipulation that it engage only in the purely mechanical tasks of collecting and tabulating the vote and making the results available to the media. However, in violation of that stipulation the NES has engaged in analyzing--even before the election--which candidates are "newsworthy" and which are not, leading to the almost universal failure to cover the election results of independent and minor party candidates.

"The NES is engaging in censorship by not making all information available to the press," charged Deborah Green, the Lobby's political director. "The Justice Department sanctioned the NES' argument that pooling resources would result in more accurate, complete and timely election results, thereby serving the public interest. Since it clearly no longer serves the public interest, the justification for its existence is called into question."

So far the Lobby has met with some 60 members of Congress and organizations such as Americans for Democratic Action and the National Students Association as part of its efforts to put pressure directly on the NES.

In a letter to NES Executive Director Robert Flaherty, Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA) wrote, "As a member of the Democratic Party, I am always pleased to see a Democrat win an election, but I cannot condone intentionally distorting the margin of victory. The NES' thoroughly undemocratic reporting [in the 11th Councilmanic District] misrepresented the will of 13,381 people. Such biased coverage has a very negative effect on how people perceive elections: it discourages them from voting at all and contributes to their cynicism... [It]... fails to register the measure of voter discontent and/or the desire for a change in leadership. Most of all, it fosters a perception that voter participation in the election has been ineffective and meaningless."

Louis Nunez, president of the National Puerto Rican Coalition, also wrote to Mr. Flaherty, pointing out that "candidates from racial and ethnic minority groups sometimes find that the only avenues to political empowerment are outside the established parties, particularly at the local level." "Failing to include the votes cast for all candidates, as the NES does," Mr. Nunez argued, "effectively disenfranchises those who have voted for third party or independent candidates."

To Be Equal

by John E. Jacob

Remembering The Past

February is usually a busy month for me--it is Black History Month, and my heavy traveling and speaking schedule becomes even busier as I go about the country attending programs connected with that event.

It is a gratifying experience, for I get the opportunity to see how people and institutions respond to the richness of African-American culture and the proud heritage we have forged from a difficult past.

It is also troubling, for I am disturbed about how little so many people--Black and white--know of the African American contributions to our nation and of the role of Black people in shaping the world's history.

Few Americans know of the powerful Black African influence on ancient civilization, of the highly developed Black empires of medieval Africa, or the multitude of Black inventors, writers, artists and statesmen of our own day.

The knowledge gap is particularly disturbing when it appears among young African-Americans.

Because of the nationwide observance of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, most are familiar with key aspects of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

But relatively few are familiar with the major roles in that movement played by Whitney M. Young, Jr., who led the National Urban League and was instrumental in getting corporations and government to change their ways.

And the NAACP's leader of the period, Roy Wilkins, who mobilized that organization to challenge segregation in the streets and in the courts, is too little known today.

Other important figures from the recent past are also neglected, although many are alive and well, and still active in the struggle.

One of the great inspirations for my generation was the late Jackie Robinson, who broke the racial barriers of organized baseball to become the first African-Ameri-

can player in the big leagues. A man of courage and wisdom, he endured a barrage of racial slurs from fans and players until he shut them up with his outstanding performance.

So it was disturbing to read that when a national magazine recently asked 20 Black players "what does Jackie Robinson mean to you?" few answers showed they understood his importance, and some, incredibly, knew next to nothing about him.

Two players, however, showed that they understand the need to know more about our past and honor the people on whose shoulders we stand today.

One said: "Robinson is the reason why I'm here today. Robinson gave us equal opportunity."

And Lee Smith of the Boston Red Sox said: "If Jackie Robinson hadn't stuck his neck out for me, there would be no way I'd be making over one million dollars."

African Americans have made such extraordinary progress over the past thirty years or so because others stuck their necks out to fight for equal rights, to demonstrate against discriminatory hiring, and to press for affirmative social policies.

While we must continually remind America of disproportionate Black poverty, we must also remind ourselves that African Americans' total income is about \$4250 billion, or more than the gross national product of all but ten nations in the world.

We have achieved success in government and corporate positions of influence, and young, educated, intact Black families are rapidly moving into the middle class--African American households earning \$50,000 and up have more than tripled in the past 20 years.

But, similarly, the numbers of poor African Americans increased. Our struggle is very far from over. And we will have a far better chance to win that struggle for fairness and equality if we know our rich past, honor those who pioneered for us, and build on their victories.

Civil Rights Journal

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

To Honor Malcolm X

Thousands of Harlem residents as well as thousands of others throughout the nation and world took the time to commemorate the life and legacy of Malcolm X on February 21, 1990. This was the 25th anniversary of Malcolm's assassination. In the African-American community there is a growing national opinion that the significance of Malcolm X needs to be taken more seriously.

On February 21, 1965, Malcolm was murdered in the Audubon Ballroom in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. He was a respected leader who made an international impact for the cause of human freedom. Although today there are many in the United States who still misunderstand why the memory of Malcolm X is loved and cherished by the African-American community, there now appears to be more openness to understand the importance of Malcolm's history and legacy.

We were present inside Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem as part of the overflow, and massive gathering of people who paid tribute to Malcolm X on the day marking 25 years since his voice was silenced by the bullets of assassins. This commemoration was jubilant and a magnificent moment of unity. In particular it was good to see a large number of young people who were anxious to hear more about Malcolm X. The Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts, pastor of Abyssinian welcomed Dr. Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X's widow, and made note that 25 years ago it was difficult to find a church even to have Malcolm's funeral. Four of Malcolm's daughters were also presented along with hundreds of community activists and leaders. It was

very clear that the spirit of Malcolm lives strongly.

Dr. James Turner is now leading the National Malcolm X Commemoration Commission which is calling for Malcolm X's birthday, May 19th, to be a national day for commemoration and celebration. During the ceremony at Abyssinian Church, part of the original eulogy for Malcolm, which was given by Ossie Davis at Malcolm's funeral, was read to remind everyone of how dear Malcolm was held by the community.

In the eulogy Davis stated, "Many will be asked what Harlem finds to honor in this stormy, controversial and bold young captain... and we will smile... and we will answer and say unto them: Did you ever talk to Brother Malcolm? Did you ever touch him, or have him smile at you? Did you ever really listen to him? Did he ever do a mean thing? Was he ever himself associated with violence or any public disturbance? For if you did you would know him. And if you knew him you would know why we must honor him: Malcolm was our manhood, our living Black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. And, in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves."

We support the efforts of the National Malcolm X Commemoration Commission. As we look forward to the 21st century, it is clear that the human rights and freedom movement of the 1960s needs to be resurrected. To honor Malcolm X should mean that by word and deed, we will make a greater commitment to end exploitation and oppression throughout the world. Peace and justice for all people is what Malcolm would demand!

CREED OF THE BLACK PRESS
The Black Press believes that America can best lead the world away from social and national antagonisms when it accords to every person, regardless of race, color, or creed, full human and legal rights. Hating no person, fearing no person, the Black Press strives to help every person in the firm belief that all are hurt as long as anyone is held back.