

NATIONAL FORUM

Along The Color Line

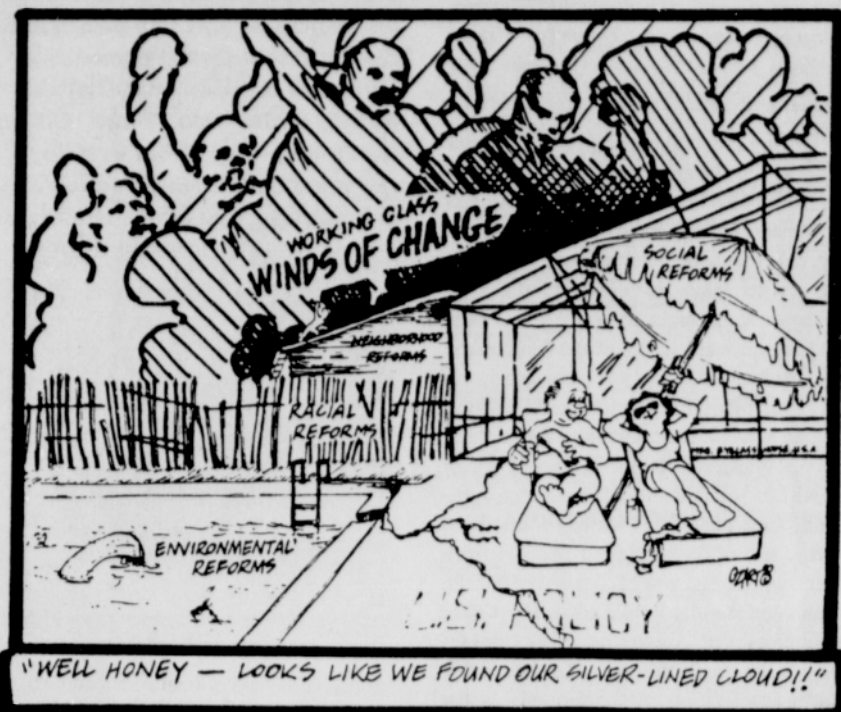
by Dr. Manning Marable

Black Workers in Crisis: The Case of Flint, Michigan

Last month I spent several weeks lecturing in the Midwest and East coast during African-American History Month. One of the most interesting and disturbing stops along the way was with the Black community of Flint, Michigan. The social and economic devastation in Flint was largely created by the flight of General Motors from the town. The crisis which exists provides important lessons to African-American working people throughout the country.

Flint is rich in labor history. Back in 1937 during the Great Depression, thousands of Black and white workers organized a massive sitdown strike against General Motors. The factories were occupied for 44 days, and hundreds of thugs were hired by management to destroy worker solidarity. Four thousand National Guardsmen, equipped with machine guns, bayonets and tear gas, were ordered to crush the strike. At the last minute, negotiators reached a compromise settlement greatly beneficial to the workers.

What has happened since this landmark sit-down strike? The people of Flint were told that they could trust the good intentions of General Motors. GM and the auto industry in general was committed to protecting the interests of working people. But in the 1970s, GM began taking the profits produced by working people and exporting them in the form of new plants outside of the U.S. By the middle of the 1980s, nearly a third of the parts in the typical GM car were produced outside of the U.S. The same kinds of trends also occurred in other industries. The big auto companies claimed that they were hemorrhaging millions a day, and that working



people had to make economic concessions in order to keep their jobs.

The city government of Flint made major concessions. Between 1976 to 1986, the Flint City Council gave GM a 50 percent cut in taxes on \$1.3 billion worth of property. GM promised it would use the tax abatement to make new jobs, and to save existing jobs. Instead, GM eliminated 18,000 jobs.

GM began to take Michigan cities and townships to court in the 1980s, demanding dramatic reductions in property taxes. Saginaw's city officials agreed to give GM a 31 percent tax reduction.

Despite workers' concessions, the

economic destruction continued. Thousands were continued to be laid off. In December, 1986, GM closed the Flint Chevy V-6 engine plant. In May, 1987, it closed the Flint Truck and Bus Line. Nationally, about a quarter million GM workers lost their jobs in the 1970s through the mid-1980s. In the 1980s, more than 30,000 people left Flint to look for employment opportunities.

The changes in the auto industry have had a disproportionately negative impact on the African-American community. There are several ways to measure this impact. Changes in technology, and the use of cybernation, have eliminated thousands of jobs. According to one study by Samuel D.K. James, in 1985 about 40 percent of the white workers who had lost their jobs between 1979 to 1984 had not found replacement employment; during the same period, the figure for displaced Black workers was 60 percent. In a short three year period, from 1977-1980, there was a decline of almost 50,000 Black autoworkers at Ford, Chrysler and GM, who were largely replaced by technological changes in the work process.

Blacks comprise only about 11 percent of the U.S. workforce, but they still account for 17 percent of the labor force for GM, Chrysler and Ford. Black autoworkers earned over \$3 billion in wages last year. However, between 1979 and 1984, manufacturing employment for all U.S. industries declined by 18 percent, while manufacturing jobs held by Blacks declined 27 percent.

In the states where automobile production is dominant, the Great Lakes region, Black manufacturing employment fell 36 percent. Significantly, many of the new Japanese auto factories are being located in areas where there are significantly lower populations of Blacks than older auto producing areas.

Today, sections of Flint look like they've been blasted with neutron bombs. Black youth unemployment is over 50 percent. Teenagers complain that they have only four real options: working at minimum wage, becoming pregnant and existing on welfare, joining the armed services, or selling drugs. The economic crisis has generated Black-on-Black crime, alcoholism, drug abuse and the disruption of many institutions such as the Black church.

The solution to the crisis of Black working class people isn't more concessions. We need legislation restricting the powerful corporations from moving capital and factories outside the U.S. and from state to state. More importantly, we need new aggressive leadership in organized labor, to fight for workers' interests. We need to revive militancy of the 1937 sitdown strike, demanding that a job, health care, and drug-free communities are human rights.

Nation's First Black Governor to Address National Urban League Conference

The Honorable L. Douglas Wilder, Governor of Virginia, and New York City's first Black mayor, The Honorable David N. Dinkins will be among the many outstanding speakers at the National Urban League Conference, which will take place July 29-August 1 in New York City.

Governor Wilder, the nation's first elected Black governor, will speak Wednesday, August 1 at 9 a.m. on "Political Leadership for the 21st Century"—stressing the political strides that African-Americans have made in this country and the potential for further political empowerment in the Black community.

Mayor Dinkins will be the League's Dinner Speaker on Wednesday, August 1, 1990 at 7:30 p.m. at the close of the four-day conference.

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

by Dr. Lenora Fulani

You Can't Be Proper and Fight For Our People

In touring college campuses during International Women's Month, I have been enormously moved by the responsiveness of young Black women to my message of radical independence.

"A lot of us have the same politics as Dr. Fulani does, except that we didn't know where to go or what to do with it," one student told a reporter. "By coming here she opened an avenue for us."

Another young sister said, "My generation knows that we have not overcome. But not many Black leaders are saying, 'this isn't really working.' Dr. Fulani is the first Black leader I've heard face up to that."

A third student called me up at home less than 24 hours after I spoke at her school to find out how she could start a chapter of the New Alliance Party on campus—despite the fact that she is graduating in May. "I don't think I can leave here talking about Dr. Fulani's ideas but not doing anything to incorporate them," she explained. "If I did that I'd just be a talker."

Why are these young women—the "promising" ones who are told by their college administrators that they can make it if they play by the rules and don't rock the boat—embracing independent, Black-led and multi-racial politics?

A lot of these young women are the sisters and cousins and daughters of poor Black women. They've been put into a process that's intended to make them middle class, but they're not so different from the ones who were left behind in the communi-

ties.

At school there's a lot of pressure on them to be who they aren't. When I talk to them, I give them "permission" to be who they are, to bring their mothers and grandmothers out of the closet. I'm saying that poverty is not their shame. It's the shame of this country. I've been calling on them to respond to the need for radical solutions in the '90s.

It makes young people crazy trying to play the role of a socially disembodied "student" when their brothers are being murdered in the streets. They're expected to act as if nothing has happened—as if everything is fine—while genocide is being perpetrated against the Black community and other communities of color. But the communities aren't in another world. And the struggle needs to be brought directly into the college.

My presence forces the students to think about what they're going to do with their lives, about where they're at. Last week I spoke at Spelman College in Atlanta, probably the most prestigious Black women's college in the country. During the question and answer period a young woman asked me why I'm so "hard" on Bill Cosby (he and his wife donated \$20 million dollars to the school), whose TV show is, in my opinion, nothing but an endlessly insulting glorification of anti-poor and racist values and role models. This student thought our people "need" shows like that.

I told her no. Not only that, I suggested

that the Cosby's should give their millions to the Black communities and to the New Alliance Party! Why?

Because Bill Cosby didn't walk out of his house and onto prime time television, I told the students. Millions of ordinary Black people struggled to make it possible. No one makes money like that in a vacuum—not rich white men and not rich Black men. We don't need to be grateful to Cosby; that money belongs to us.

My talk was very controversial. Among other things, I raised the issue of why they had allowed the New York Times and the rest of the white corporate-controlled media to shape their attitudes towards the Reverend Al Sharpton, a working class hero who has been the target of a vendetta conducted by the legal and political establishment of New York State for the "crime" of listening to Tawana Brawley, a 15 year old Black child no one would believe when she said she had been raped.

A young Black man in the audience got up to thank Fulani. This was the first time, he said, he had ever heard anyone say something positive about Reverend Al.

The Black establishment doesn't want to touch Reverend Sharpton. They don't like him because they know he's dangerous—he makes difficulties for them. That's the reason Black administrators put pressure on the students to not rock the boat. They're telling them you can't be too out there, too radical, too controversial—because you'll spoil it for the rest of us. But you can't be proper and fight for our people.

Civil Rights Journal

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Support The Americans With Disabilities

On March 12, 1990, a protest reminiscent of the civil rights movement of the 1960s took place in Washington, D.C. A group of persons with disabilities in wheelchairs rolled down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. There they crawled up the steps to bring attention to the need to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act. Rep. Major Owens, an African-American, was a key spokesperson for this demonstration of over 500 people.

Some twenty-five years after the passage of the major civil rights legislation of the sixties, it is still legal under Federal law not to provide access to public buildings in the form of ramps for persons with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in the Senate during 1989 and now under consideration in the House of Representatives, is supposed to change this.

African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native Americans should be very concerned about the fate of this bill. Racial/ethnic persons with disabilities suffer a double barreled form of discrimination. Studies have shown that African-Americans are twice as likely as whites to become disabled. This can be

attributed to poverty, poor nutrition, poor housing, poor health care and unemployment. Many racial/ethnic persons with disabilities live in poor neighborhoods where curb cuts, ramps and other necessities are not available. It is outrageous that most working African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans with disabilities earn less than the poverty level.

Shameful as it may seem, most of these injustices are still legal. It is still perfectly legal under federal law for persons with disabilities to be turned down for a job that they are qualified for. It is still legal not to provide adequate access to public transportation. It is still legal for restaurants, stores and other retail establishments to refuse to serve a disabled person. In short, it is still legal to openly discriminate against approximately 40 million Americans with disabilities.

Many have pointed that this bill is one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation since the 1960s.

It comes as no surprise that two of the most outspoken champions of the Americans with Disabilities Act are African-Americans. The Rev. Jesse Jackson was the

first major presidential candidate to speak out on disability rights.

Jackson began to speak out on this issue in 1984. Most of us would not have noticed that Jackson opened his remarks at the 1988 presidential debate in Des Moines, Iowa by thanking the signers of the bill. The primary advocate and acknowledged leader of the movement to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act is Congressman Major Owens. He has been a long time advocate for rehabilitation and independent living programs, not only for racial/ethnic persons with disabilities but for all Americans with disabilities. He is the Chairperson of the House Subcommittee on Select Education and one of the original drafters of the bill. Congressman Owens deserves our salute and support.

Persons with disabilities are no longer willing to depend on infrequent charity. They have rights like everyone else. Discrimination against persons with disabilities, regardless of race, is an injustice. We urge everyone to write your representatives in Congress to express your support for passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

VANTAGE POINT

Articles and Essays by Ron Daniels

A Complex Interplay of Forces Will Determine the Outcome in South Africa

I have just returned from participating in a seminar in Africa on "U.S. and Soviet Policy in Southern Africa." The seminar was held in Zimbabwe under the auspices of the East-West program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the Southern African Political Economy Series Trust (SAPES). Outstanding scholars from the Soviet Union, the United States and Southern Africa attended the seminar in addition to representatives of the liberation movements in South Africa - The African National Congress (ANC), The Pan African Congress (PAC), The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).

What emerged from the seminar was an outline of the prospects for future development in Southern African in general and South Africa in particular given the current state of U.S. - Soviet relations. There was a consensus that the cold war competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union is all but over in light of the dramatic upheavals in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union's urgent pre-occupation with internal domestic problems. There was substantial disagreement on what the collapse of the cold war means for Southern Africa.

Soviet scholars generally articulated a view that a new era of U.S. - Soviet cooperation, as reflected in recent agreements around Angola and Namibia, portends well in terms of peace and development for Southern Africa. Scholars from Southern Africa were quick to point out that Soviet Union had tended to be very supportive of the liberation movements in Africa, while the United States had most often supported colonial regimes in opposition to the aspirations of the liberation movements. Serious concern was raised about the possible withdrawal of Soviet military and economic assistance for liberation movements. If the Soviet Union becomes a non-factor in Southern Africa the fear is that, left unchecked, the United States could attempt to impose its will in South Africa and throughout the region.

This latter concern revolved around the contention that U.S. interests in South Africa are essentially imperialistic and neo-colonial in nature. That is to say that the United States is interested in fostering or preserving relationships and structures which protect and advance the economic interests of U.S. corporations and by extension the interests of western capitalism. Within the context of the struggle in South Africa there was the clear perception that the U.S. and Britain, in pursuit of their interests, would press for an outcome that would result in "Black power with guarantees for whites."

The net effect of this outcome would be Black majority rule politically with whites retaining economic control - real power. White economic control would keep intact the privileged status of the minority white population and maintain a safe and lucrative haven for U.S. and western investments. The Black population would gain "political freedom" but would remain economically disadvantaged and impoverished. Indeed African-American scholars, largely with their white counterparts offering a dissenting view, argued that U.S. policy would be guided by a passion to insure white domination in Southern Africa, Africa and the entirety of the Third World.

African-American scholars pointed to Zimbabwe as an example of how a liberation struggle can gain political power and yet not achieve economic empowerment for the African masses. Because of the Lancaster Agreement which provided extraordinary "guarantees" for whites, there has been very little progress economically for the vast majority of Blacks in Zimbabwe. Ten years after "independence" the 100,000 white settlers who constitute about 1% of the population control nearly 2/3 of all the wealth. Meanwhile the 9.3 million Africans control only 1/3 of the wealth, suffer from an unemployment rate of 25% and are plagued by massive underemployment. Blacks "control" the politics but whites control the wealth.

Zimbabwe is often held up as a "model" of Black and white reconciliation and co-existence. Is the Zimbabwe model what the U.S. and its western partners have in mind for South Africa? The African and African-American scholars were of the opinion that left to its own devices the U.S. would be pleased with such an outcome.

There was strong agreement among African and African-American scholars, however, that the "African-American lobby" in the U.S. could be the decisive element in radically altering the intent of U.S. policy in South Africa and the region. A combination of massive external pressure for genuine political democracy and economic rights for the Black majority in South Africa and continued mass pressure by the liberation movement inside South Africa might be the only hope for a just settlement in South Africa. Without that potentially potent combination there is the prospect that protection for "white rights" will be the dominant issue determining the outcome in South Africa.

Next Week: U.S. Africa Aid is an In-sult to African-Americans.



To Be Equal

by John E. Jacob

The Census Counts

The 1990 Census kicks off April 1, and it has to count as the most important event of the year for minority Americans.

That's because the census results will affect just about every area of minority life.

The first, and most obvious, result of the 1990 Census will be the use of its population figures to reapportion election districts.

Within a year, the Census Bureau will release population data to state and local governments who will use it to reshape electoral districts ranging from congressional districts to local offices.

Many federal and state programs are also based on population figures released by the Bureau. Federal aid programs totaling nearly \$40 billion are distributed every year on the basis of the census data.

Local services will be affected, too. Officials use the numbers to determine whether to close a firehouse in a neighborhood that is losing population and relocate it to another that's gaining population. The same holds for schoolhouses, libraries, hospitals and other services.

And that is why it is so urgent for every single minority person to make sure he or she is counted by filing out the census forms and returning them, and by being helpful to the individual census enumerators who will make visits to households.

The Bureau estimates that 78 percent of households will return and complete the census forms. Those that don't return one by the April 1 deadline will be visited by a census worker.

In the past, the Census Bureau has admitted that it missed many minorities.

In 1980, the census undercounted African-Americans by about 6 percent, and the

undercount for young black males in some inner city communities is estimated to be in the 30 percent range.

Nationally, observers believe up to five million people don't get counted, and disproportionate numbers of them are African-Americans, Hispanics and other minorities.

With the rise of homelessness, it is likely that some of America's poorest people—those with the most to gain from an accurate count—will not participate. That's despite the Bureau's efforts to canvass shelters and public areas where the homeless tend to be.

After many years of minority complaints about the undercount, the Bureau appears to be making a good faith effort to count everybody. But the very nature of this enormous undertaking virtually assures that many will be missed.

The problem is particularly severe in the big cities. The 1980 census results prompted a number of cities, ranging from New York to Houston, to sue. The government agreed to canvass 150,000 households and then decide whether to adjust the final 1990 count.

It says this is a purely technical decision, but the historic undercount of minorities and the importance of the final results remove it from the purely technical arena.

Community groups and the cities will be closely watching to ensure that the final results are as accurate as possible and that any undercount is effectively corrected.

But the best line of defense against an undercount that takes political power and government dollars out of minority communities and distributes them to more affluent ones is to stand up and be counted.