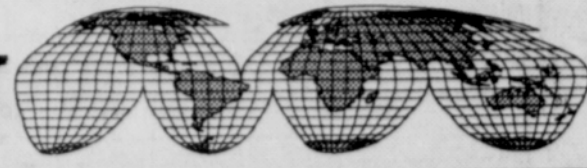




# EDITORIAL / OPINION



## Civil Rights Journal



## To Be Equal

by John E. Jacob

## Perspectives

### The Politics of the Death Penalty

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

In the wake of the very solemn and celebratory 1990 Easter services of worship, programs, parades and fashion shows, particularly here in the United States, one would think that the cry "Crucify Them!... Crucify Them!" would not be heard with its current frequency and national volume. The raging debate concerning the imposition of the death penalty as punishment for alleged criminal activity has taken on an unprecedented political tone.

The state does not have the power to create life and the state should not have the power to destroy life. The United States Supreme Court tentatively delayed the scheduled execution of Robert A. Harris in the state of California while legal arguments are made about Harris' mental competency.

Former San Francisco Mayor Diane Feinstein, is now leading in the polls in California as a Democratic candidate for Governor. Yet, Feinstein, who is known to be a liberal politician on most issues, was not the front-runner in the polls until she recently declared "I am the only Democrat who's for the death penalty." The television ads on Feinstein's new pro death penalty position have seemingly captured the blood thirst of the electorate in the state of California.

Disturbingly the cry for capital punishment is being used more as a political strategy to lure votes than as a moral stance on a critical social issue. Of course, American politicians have been known to flip flop on the issues to attract voters. The cry for capital punishment has not only increased the rate of executions in the United States during the last several years, but also the normative value of a human life has now plunged back to the days when "hangings" were part and parcel of this nation's sense of exacting justice.

Today, there are approximately 2,250 person on Death row in the United States. Across the nation, political campaign consultants are urging both Democrats and Republicans to take advantage of the politics of the death

penalty. To our dismay, even some prominent African American politicians have now found it necessary to join the growing chorus of political voices demanding the death penalty. Governor L. Douglas Wilder of Virginia abandoned his long opposition to capital punishment when he announced his intentions to run for Governor. And now even Andrew Young, an outspoken civil rights leader, Christian minister and former Mayor of Atlanta, has changed his previous opposition to capital punishment to campaign in favor of the death penalty as he runs to be Governor of Georgia.

Forty percent of this nation's Death Row prisoners are African American which is nearly three times the African American percentage of the population of the United States. In a state like Florida, which has executed twenty one persons since 1976, the second highest number of executions following 33 persons executed in Texas, there is also a disproportionately high percentage of Hispanics on Death Row. Florida Governor Robert Martinez is reported to be increasing his standing in political pools after running television ads jubilantly affirming that he has signed 90 death warrants.

The very notion of capital punishment is an affront to human morality and dignity. Unfortunately, the advance of civilization on issues like the death penalty has not progressed very far. The Greek philosopher, Plato, once said, "The death sentence should serve as an example for the profit of others." Of course what Plato mistakenly believed, was that capital punishment would serve as a deterrent to crime once others were aware of this final form of punishment. Yet down through the centuries the imposition of the death penalty has only had the opposite result and in states in this country where capital punishment is now operative, the crime rate has in fact not decreased but dramatically increased.

We should not allow politicians to continue to profit from their support of this evil in our national midst.

### Planning For Peace

The euphoria about winding down the Cold War is wearing off, and policy-makers now need to take a long, hard look at easing the transition to a peacetime economy.

The policy direction should be clear—reshaping our defense structure to meet national security needs in a radically changed world, cutting excess defense expenditures, and reinvesting the huge savings in deficit reduction and investment in our economic future.

It's in the specifics that things tend to get tangled. For example, the task of reshaping our defense structure runs up against those who want to preserve worldwide commitments that may be marginal to real national security considerations.

Then there's the debate about how much of the defense budget to cut. That depends on devising a new national security strategy, but it is clear that annual savings of about \$150 billion can be made.

Finally, what to do with those savings—do we implement an Urban Marshall Plan that develops our human resources or do we continue to starve public needs by cutting taxes?

It's clear to me that our defense obligations should be realistic, that we should cut as much as we can from current spending levels, and invest the savings in the Urban Marshall Plan.

But beating swords into plowshares won't be easy. While African Americans and the poor have the most to gain from redirecting priorities to human resources investments, they can also be losers in the process unless the transition is carefully planned for.

The armed forces, for example, is a major employer of minorities and perhaps the employer with the best equal employment hiring and promotion record.

Down-sizing the military means that many minorities will be thrown onto a civilian labor market marked by high employment, especially for young people. Minority officers will enter a civilian marketplace in which compa-

nies are cutting managers, and where opportunities for African Americans have always been tight.

But cutting force structures is only part of the issue. In the coming years, we can expect sharp cuts in defense procurement. We simply don't need all those high tech weapons now rolling off the assembly lines.

But we do need the expertise of the companies engaged in producing those military products and the skills of their workers. It would be suicidal to simply cut procurement budgets and let those people sink into unemployment.

We have to carefully plan the transition from a defense-oriented economy to a competitive civilian economy, not only to cushion the hardships of workers and their communities, but also to ensure that they will play a productive role in the future.

There's no reason that plants now producing tanks can't produce civilian goods, or that workers now producing military aircraft can't be retrained to produce civilian goods.

The nation's infrastructure needs are so huge that it should be possible to construct a relatively painless transition.

The biggest threat is that the issue will become a political football, with unnecessary plants and bases being preserved just to keep payrolls intact and local voters happy. And there are indications that old Cold Warriors who want to keep Pentagon budgets high are exploiting legitimate fears.

So the sooner we start planning the transition from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy, the better.

Such planning should include assistance and retraining for workers and veterans displaced by defense cuts, incentives for defense industries to convert to civilian production, and a federal infrastructure rebuilding program that utilizes their capabilities.

So far, I haven't seen much evidence that such consideration are getting the attention they need from our policymakers. It's time they did.

### Black Children In Wonderland: Alice And Humpty Dumpty

Last week's "Education" article highlighted some of the problems presented to Black students by the SAT test; in particular their 1988 performance, frightening, when it was compared with whites and 12 of the minority segments of our population. At the same time I pointed out that successful methods have been developed to improve minority scores, e.g. the computer program designed for that specific purpose by a Black educator ("Dollars & Sense", February-March 1990).

I have been confronted with some handwringing and despair on "how difficult it will be to reprise that drive and motivation toward educational expertise (and the American Dream) that seemed so omnipresent in earlier Black generations. In my "Immigration" article on the front of the same edition, I commented upon the reason for a mind-numbing attrition in some areas—racism and related obstacles. It was given that the genes and "intelligence" was still there. I put it that what is needed in our school systems are more teachers and "administrators" who know this is to be a fact (actually "believe" this) and who are unreservedly committed to retrieve those situations given up for lost. It need not be so—I belong to organizations that includes over a score of principals who have won many national honors for demonstrating such a commitment (National Association for Schools of Excellence).

But, today, I want to start at the beginning of the process, where some of us have recognized that Black kids do not have "learning disabilities", so much as a number of us have "teaching disabilities". This, in that we do not understand what goes on in the mind of a child (or forget!). Bear with me while we examine a "childhood tale" (You just think its childish!). I'll soon make my point as we take a look at a Lewis Carroll classic, "Alice Through the Looking Glass". The companion novel was the familiar, "Alice in Wonderland".

A lively dialogue begins when Humpty Dumpty announces that he has received an "un-birthday" present. A puzzled Alice questions Humpty, "I mean, what is an un-birthday present?"

And then, the "logical" reply, "A present given when it isn't your birthday of course." Alice considers this, "I like 'birthday' presents the best." There ensues in this classis exercise in reasoning, written over a hundred years ago, a rigorous examination of basic structures in logic that are fundamental to understanding the "scientific method", computer program design, and "artificial intelligence" machines. Small children can do a lot of this if their development is not stifled.

Alice pursues the matter: "I like birthday presents the best." "You don't know what you are talking about," says Humpty. "How many days in a year?" "Three hundred and sixty-five," replies Alice.

"And how many birthdays have you?" asks Humpty.

"One!" After some computation is performed with pencil and paper, Humpty now believes that Alice understands that the remainder of the '364 non-birthday events' represent a vast superiority over one birthday—but then he crows, "There's glory for you!" When Alice says, "I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Humpty smiles contemptuously, of course you don't know—till I tell you! I meant, "there's a nice knock-down argument for you... when I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less," he said. Let us see if it isn't a fact that children can thoroughly understand this.

Martin Gardner (a famous contributor to "Scientific American" magazine) had this to say about the same exchange, "Even in logic and mathematics, where terms are usually more precise than in other subject matters, enormous confusion often results from a failure to realize that words 'mean neither more nor less' than they are intended to mean. In Carroll's other novel, "Alice In Wonderland", a small creature puts it more directly, "Things are what I say they are." that's the rule—from microchip to a formal language—a child easily understands, whereas we often get too cute with metaphor, hyperbole and simile, causing all types of confusion about "meaning."

It was around 1970 that a doctor at Oregon Health Science University called me after reading an Oregonian article describing a new approach I had developed to teach small children computer programming. Dr. Stanley Jacobs, inventor of the drug D.M.S.O.). He asked me to give a demonstration at the Lake Oswego Montessori School where his wife was director. My approach used the paradigms and methodology cited here; the sessions were successful and led to engagements in other locations. Children can understand—let us look at a session I conducted with Black kids in Northeast Portland.

This demonstration over several days was at the Black Education Center on Northeast 17th and was described fully in the September 1, 1988 edition of this paper. My description of the process began by quoting the famous poet, Gertrude Stein, "A rose is a rose, is a rose" (again, things are what I say they are—all that is needed is agreement among participants). I went into detail a process where children, 5 to 8 years of age were taught to substitute a tomato, potato, apple and orange in point-to-point correspondence with the numbers 1,2,3, and 4. They quickly understood that they had been given a new language—and the very same tasks could be performed as with numbers.

Tomato was always one, potato always 2 and so forth. Consequently, when the children were presented with the set, "potato-orange-apple", a chorus of little voices would identify the number 243. "Apple-tomato-potato" would elicit the response 312. It was an easy next step to substitute articles of clothing (shoe-hat-scarf-glove) to form a new code—and eventually, "X-Y-X and K". By the end of the week, the kids were adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing in terms of any homey "symbol" their fertile imagination provided.

We see that algebra is no problem for little people before many are stripped of their enthusiastic powers to think, learn, imagine and otherwise display their innate "intelligence". We cannot continue to allow a disabled education system to treat and classify Black youth as "learning-disabled", when in truth, we know who has the problem.

### Choose New Super. of Instruction Carefully

To the Editor:

The Voters' Pamphlet lists five running for State Supt. of Public Instruction. Compare carefully their qualification as to experience, expertise, and politics. The winner will have four years to advise and lead teachers, administrators, parents, and others in fostering learning achievement by Oregon students. It takes knowledge and ability to do this important job.

The state school chief doesn't set tax policy (the job of Gov. and Legislature), but the results of spending tax dollars get affected by this official. Pick the best "state schoolmaster."

Yours,  
Dr. Fred W. Decker  
Ret'd Deputy Asst. U.S. Sec. of Education for Research and Improvement, 1981-85.

Kindness is a hard thing to give away; it usually comes back.

Being alone is sometimes worth being lonely.

## THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

by Dr. Lenora Fulani

As the trial of Reverend Al Sharpton ends its third week, the evidence is mounting up—but not against this working class Black hero. It is becoming clearer every day that the real criminal in the frame-up of Reverend Al is New York State's attorney general, Robert Abrams, who has been out to get Reverend Sharpton, attorneys C. Vernon Mason and Alton Maddox, Jr., since the days when they brought into being a militant "No Justice, No Peace!" movement out of the ashes of Howard Beach—the Queens, New York neighborhood where a mob of white youth drove 21 year old Michael Griffith into the path of an oncoming car almost three and half years ago.

Abrams bided his time until he saw an opportunity to get these independent Black leaders who had dared to stand up to the liberal white Democratic Party establishment. His chance came year after Howard Beach, in the form of a 15 year old Black child named Tawana Brawley from a little town in central New York who said she had been raped by a gang of white men wearing badges. Abrams saw his chance then; he would use Tawana to entrap Reverend Sharpton and the attorneys.

And that's a crime. Richard Nixon was impeached for using the office of the President to pursue a vendetta against his political opponents. But that's exactly what New York's highest law officer has done. Here's how, and why.

The movement that began, but did not end, with the demand for a special prosecutor in the Howard Beach case didn't only challenge the powers-that-be over a case of racial violence. Even more importantly it challenged the first commandment of white liberal reformers like Cuomo and Abrams: It can all be handled within the system.

The Brawley family called in Mr. Mason, Mr. Maddox and Reverend Sharpton when it became obvious that the Dutchess County criminal justice system was no more likely to find and punish the animals who raped their daughter than they would be anywhere else in America. The Brawleys and their advisors decided to do what had been down in Howard Beach—Tawana would not cooperate in any "investigation" that was actually a coverup.

That's exactly what Abrams and Company had hoped would happen. Governor Cuomo cried crocodile tears and said yes to a special prosecutor almost before he was asked. He appointed Robert Abrams. That was a provocation; you don't use an elected official to be a special prosecutor, because he's not going to investigate other elected officials or police officers.

But the Brawley grand jury was never intended to investigate the rape, only to prove that Tawana was a liar and that her advisors were con artists and worse. Robert Abrams was orchestrating a scenario to justify the retaliation that would come later. In the case of Mr. Maddox, it would be disbarment proceedings. In the case of Reverend Sharpton, it was a 67 count indictment that came down last June. It was an evil plan and it worked.

The rape of an African American teenager (like the murder of African American youth) does not usually cause our professional politicians (white or Black) to lose much sleep. Nor do the white corporate owned media care much about the brutalization of our children. But the Brawley case was different, because Tawana was the club that Abrams, aided and abetted by the mass media, would use to beat up on Reverend Sharpton.

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