



# EDITORIAL / OPINION



## VANTAGE POINT

Articles and Essays by Ron Daniels



## Perspectives

### Adventures In Learning



by Professor McKinley Burt

## Saving The Environment Is Not A White Issue

The Twentieth Anniversary of Earth Day was an event which received widespread publicity in virtually every aspect of the media. Informative educational features aired on radio and television and in depth articles ran in magazines and newspapers nationwide. The issue of saving planet earth appropriately received serious focus as the evidence mounts that the environment is in serious and dangerous disrepair. That the public paid attention at all was a triumph for the environmental movement. With dogged determination the environmental movement has blossomed to the point that "green" is now near the top of the American Agenda and world agenda.

What I found striking and alarming about Earth Day, however, was the noticeable absence of a significant African American presence at the various forums, debates and events associated with the Earth Day activities. Overwhelmingly the complexion of the green movement in American is white. It is as if Black people feel that the green issues are not pertinent our survival and development as a people.

Some of this lack of an active presence by African Americans in the green movement can be traced to the 60's and 70's. With the advent of the Black Power movement large numbers of white activists no longer felt that there was a meaningful role for them in the civil rights movement. Many white activists turned their creative energy to organizing around nuclear disarmament, peace and the environment. There was a tendency to isolate these issues from the immediacy of the civil-rights agenda and the interest of Black people. Because the initiative around these issues

was principally carried forth under white leadership, African Americans increasingly came to perceive peace, disarmament and the environment as "white issues."

It occurs to me that it is time to correct what is obviously a misperception.

### In fact African Americans and Third World people have an urgent stake in saving and preserving the environment.

Saving the environment is a Black issue too. African Americans must be clear that global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain and toxic waste in the land and rivers are not phenomena which will spare African Americans simply because of our skin color. Environmental destruction means human destruction, including Black people in America and the world.

In fact African Americans and Third World people have an urgent stake in saving and preserving the environment. Within the United States, African American and poor communities seem to be disproportionately targeted for toxic waste dumps and Africa and the Third World are increasingly seen by the west as a dumping grounds for toxic waste. Similarly it is the land, resources and forests in the Third World which are also being disproportionately ravished in the interest of profit for national and multinational corporations and giant developers. The madness of materialism from capitalist exploitation in the west

and mechanical Marxism in the east must be stopped if the human race is to survive.

African people need not take a back seat to anyone as it relates to an appreciation for nature and the environment. Within traditional African society there was a definite value placed on the need to be in harmony with nature and the importance of maintaining the delicate balance in the chemistry between human beings and the environment. It is precisely this harmony and balance which is being jeopardized by greed and materialism. The unfolding of the modern commercial and industrial revolution and the acquisitive drive for "progress" has led to the sacrifice of nature and the environment in the interest of achieving the "good life". The victims of this progress cannot allow this insane trend towards universal self-destruction to continue.

Green is Black and Black is Green. African people are once again challenged to afro-centrally search our own past to discover the basis for the very survival of humankind. The spiritual and ethical values which lead our ancestors to have a wholesome and healthy respect for nature and the environment must be our guide as we join in and indeed assume a leading role in preserving the planet. Saving the environment is not a white issue. African Americans and Third World people have too much at stake to lay back and let others lead on this issue. The future belongs to the developing peoples of Africa and Third World. But there will be no future if all we inherit is an overheated, toxic waste-infested and disastrously polluted planet.

Well, enough now for SAT, semiotics, signs, meaning and so forth; there are other modes of learning. I often think that the most enduring and effective learning experiences of all can be those unplanned or loosely-structured situations that frequently occur as one is growing up. It is true, of course, that sometimes a wise adult is intervening from an unperceived vantage point. And it is equally true that a favorable (motivating) learning environment will help the whole process along; not necessarily a "law-and-order" school system, but sort of a child's "mini-society" where education and gaining knowledge is considered the "in thing"--the best of all possible worlds.

Several such happy experiences stand out from my childhood. At the John Marshall Elementary School in St. Louis, there were three floors, fifteen classrooms, and about nineteen teachers. I can still remember that awesome view down the stairwell, from the top floor down to the mystical basement. This basement not only contained the heating plant, but the most fascinating machine a small child could ever hope to see--the "eraser cleaner". Also, it was rumored that somewhere down in these catacombs was hidden a merciless "spanking machine" to whose unfeeling metal arms an errant pupil might be consigned.

One of my fondest memories of this institution centers around the "bookmobile" that traversed the halls on two afternoons each week. Students who excelled in their lessons on a given morning--or who turned in outstanding homework--were allowed to leave their classroom immediately after lunch, at which time they would select prized books from the rolling shelves and take them off to a quiet place provided for reading (after the usual fight over choice items). I still remember my first read-

ing of many classics: Jules Verne's "Twenty-Thousand Leagues Beneath the Sea", and his "Journey to the Center of the Earth"; "Moby Dick"; Washington Irving's, "The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow"; All of Edgar Rice Burrough's "Tarzan" stories; "Aesop's Fables"; "Grimm's Fairy Tales", and many, many others (we could have skipped Rudyard Kipling's "Jungle Tales" and "Little Black Sambo").

A kid's appetite for vicarious adventure and knowledge of the world was raised to a voracious level. Every pupil had a library card, but often all the "good stuff" was out. Fortunately, there was in those days another source, right in the neighborhood. Almost every drugstore had a "Book Loan Corner" where, for three cents a day, you could "rent" any of a fabulous selection of books or magazines. There was every genre imaginable, from sea adventures to science fiction, from westerns to romantic novels. And then, there were the pulps: "Doc Savage, The Shadow, Daredevil Aces, Flying Aces"--all the early precursors to "Superman, Batman, Etc." And if you had a much older sibling to front for you, you could get something like "Spicy Western Stories" whose "big bust females" would keep a small boy bug-eyed for hours.

Now, in this totally segregated city of St. Louis, there, nevertheless, were a few isolated islands of interracial relations--most particularly where children were concerned. My house was at the fringe of the ghetto, the next residential blocks in two directions were occupied by second and third generation immigrants, Italians, Jews, and Germans--all very poor. Until the age of twelve I was the only Black youngster in the neighborhood and for some reason I had uncontested access to the local hangout for kids--"Lipshitz's Delicatessen &

Soda Fountain" (this may have been because my grandfather had a formidable reputation for maintaining law and order in the neighborhood with the help of a 12-gauge shotgun--he was head of a local Rod and Gun Club).

Here, at the "Deli", another interesting learning process went on. "Hymie", the 12-year-old handicapped son of the Jewish proprietor, would "hold court" from his wheelchair almost every evening after school. It seemed to us that the kid must have read every book ever written--a great number of them, it appeared, were on the shelves of the family living quarters at the rear of the delicatessen (though his parents later could afford a special school for the handicapped, mostly he was educated at home). Many evenings after school, we would drop by for ice cream sodas and bubble gum, and then, if the weather permitted, wheel Hymie to close-by Fountain Park. Hymie would expound for hours on the cultural and racial backgrounds of the immigrant families in the neighborhood. We learned more about European history and literature from our little friend than most college students do today.

Next week we will examine another learning experience, this one coming about after the death of my grandfather. I had to leave high school to go to work, finding the most lucrative remuneration to be with the railroad work gangs (gaudy dancers) in various parts of the country. The drive and motivation for education among untutored Blacks in those days was absolutely incredible.

### Black Mayors Elect First Woman President

(Atlanta - April 25, 1990)-- In a history making move, Mayor Anita Blackwell of Mayersville, Mississippi was elected to serve as the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc.'s (NCBM) first woman president at the organization's 16th Annual Convention in New Orleans. Prior to being elected to NCBM's top post, Mayor Blackwell served as 2nd Vice President under outgoing president, Mayor James L. Ustry of Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Long known as a civil and human rights activist, Mayor Blackwell was an associate and friend of the late Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville, MS who was credit with founding the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and successfully challenging irregular voting practices in the state.

She helped organize and develop the first homeownership opportunity project for low-income families in Gulfport, MS.



## To Be Equal

by John E. Jacob

### Law Encourages Bias

It's four years since Congress passed an immigration control law that included penalties against employers found to have hired undocumented aliens.

At the time the law was being debated, civil rights groups warned that such a provision would be an open invitation to employers to practice discrimination.

It seemed obvious that, rather than take the risk of hiring Hispanics, Caribbeans, Asians, or other workers who might turn out to be illegal immigrants, many employers would simply stick to hiring native-born whites.

The law was supposed to prevent such discrimination--its supporters argued that all employers had to do was to get proof of legal residence.

But many employers didn't want to get involved with such paperwork or decided the risk of being hit with penalties if some undocumented worker slipped through their efforts was too great.

As a result, the government has found widespread discrimination.

A study of the effects of the law was released by the General Accounting Office, a federal agency, in late March. It found that about one out of five employers surveyed discriminated in hiring.

Many refused to hire any job applicants who had a "foreign appearance or accent." Others wouldn't hire anyone who was not a U.S. citizen.

To supplement the survey, the GAO sent out pairs of "testers" to 360 employers selected at random. One was Hispanic-looking; the other, Anglo.

The report found that Hispanic testers were three times as likely to be treated unfavorably, while the Anglo testers got 52 percent more job offers.

It is clear that in attempting to control illegal immigration, the government is encouraging illegal discrimination.

The policy that requires employers, in effect, to act as agents for the Immigration and Naturalization service, has resulted in gross violations of civil rights.

And while the primary effects appear to be heaviest among Hispanics, Black immigrants from Haiti and other Caribbean lands, as well as Asians and other foreign-born persons are also prime targets of employment discrimination.

The law includes a "sunset" provision that requires Congress to consider repeal if, after three years, there is evidence that it is causing widespread job

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discrimination.

The GAO study has certainly proved that it has, but there's considerable political resistance to reopening an issue the Congress thought it finally solved by passing the law.

Instead, some urge adoption of a universal worker-identification system, probably in the form of a national identity card everyone would have to carry.

That's an idea that won't fly--Americans have always resisted that kind of bureaucratic mandate. And in a computerized age that makes people more determined than ever to preserve their privacy rights, such a proposal is doomed to fail.

The problem of constructing a sound immigration policy is urgent because of its effects on our own poor, who must compete against undocumented workers in the job market.

Congress has to go back to the drawing board and come up with a sound immigration policy that includes provisions to discourage illegal discrimination against minorities who may, in fact, be legal residents.

## THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

by Dr. Lenora Fulani

### No Justice, No Peace...

Last August a 16-year old Black boy and two of his friends saw a newspaper ad for a used car and went to take a look. He never came back.

His name was Yusuf Hawkins, and he was shot to death--murdered in cold blood when a mob of thirty young white men armed with baseball bats and racial hatred, and at least one loaded gun, came after him. The story is that the killers mistakenly thought Yusuf was going to be a guest at the birthday party of a young woman in the lily-white neighborhood of Bensonhurst in Brooklyn. The implication is that the lynching was "an honest mistake."

The first trials are now underway. Keith Mondello, 20 years old, is charged with being the ringleader of the mob. Joseph Fama, 19, is accused of pulling the trigger. Only six others have been indicted. From the beginning the district attorney has looked like he was trying his best to lose these cases, to let the killers get away with murder. It wouldn't be the first time.

In the weeks between the murder and the Democratic Party primary in September, tens of thousands of Black youth poured into the streets, raising the battle cry of "No Justice, No Peace!" The Reverend Al Sharpton was there with them. In fact he was out in front, leading the demonstrations, organizing the Days of Outrage, David Dinkins, New York's first African American mayor, profited from the murder of Yusuf Hawkins and the tremendous boiling up of righteous anger that it brought in its wake. When the time came to vote, hundreds of thousands of Black people took that anger into the polling booths and pulled the lever--not so much for David as against the rampantly racist Ed Koch, who had been mayor for 12 very long years.

Today Reverend Sharpton is standing trial. He is charged with 67 counts of fraud in a trumped-up case brought by the attorney general of New York--the state's chief cop. But Reverend Sharpton's real crime in the eyes of the Democratic Party establishment that

runs New York City and New York State is that by refusing to keep his mouth shut he has forced the world--Black folks as well as white--to recognize that Black people cannot get justice... even when liberal Democrats are running the show.

Those who have stood up to defend the honor of Bensonhurst insist that it is a community of decent people. Reverend Sharpton is demanding to know, Where are they?

When he and I and attorney Alton Maddox and Yusuf's parents Moses Stewart and Diane Hawkins and hundreds of others marched through the streets of Bensonhurst arm in arm, he recently reminded readers of his weekly column "The People's Preacher", we were shouted at and called "nigger" and spat upon. What we were told by the liberals was, "Don't condemn all Bensonhurst. There are good people out here." Maybe. Where are they?

They weren't marching with us in Teaneck, New Jersey--where an unarmed 15 year old Black boy, Phillip Pannell, Jr., was recently murdered, shot in the back by a local cop after begging for mercy. The "good people" stood on the sidelines watching us, the "outside agitators." They were not with us when we came out 10,000 strong to demand justice for Michael Stewart, the young Black man murdered by a Howard Beach lynch mob four years ago. They have been absent from every move for justice, from Howard Beach to Tawana Brawley to Bensonhurst to Teaneck.

The failure of the Bensonhurst case, says Reverend Sharpton, is the failure of the City of New York to come to grips with racism. "The fact of the matter is that a lot of Bensonhurst people saw these 30 kids do this vicious act, but none of those decent people will come forward and testify. So we say, if there is no justice, there will be no peace. We mean that from the innermost parts of our souls."

Amen.

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