

Vantage Point

By Ron Daniels

The Fallacy Of Black Conservatism: Self-Help Is No Substitute For A Responsive Government

As the debate around the Clarence Thomas nomination rages throughout the African American Community, some Black folks have rallied to support Judge Thomas because of his advocacy of Black self-help. The idea that African Americans should employ self-help strategies and not look to government programs or affirmative action to advance Black progress is a key tenet of Black conservatism. In my judgement, the notion that African Americans can overcome past and present racism and economic exploitation by exclusively relying on our own resources is seriously flawed and naive. African Americans should not fall into the "either/or" trap. Black self-help development strategies and assistance from a humane and responsive government are both necessary to liberate the masses of Black people from hunger, poverty, disease, and chronic unemployment and underemployment.

I am certainly a vigorous proponent of self-help development as a major priority for African Americans. There is no question about the urgent need for African Americans to adopt a self-help/empowerment philosophy as the cornerstone of the struggle for Black survival and development. We must think in terms of marshalling our human and material resources as a means of becoming more self-reliant and independent.

It is equally clear to me, however, that self help alone cannot provide all of the jobs, housing, education, health care, and other economic and social opportunities which the masses of African Americans need to achieve a meaningful measure of equity and parity in this society. No African American, not even Clarence Thomas, rises from the depths of poverty in the United States without the benefit of some form of

government assistance and/or affirmative action. Self-help is not a substitute for a humane government. It should be the responsibility of government to utilize the tax dollars collected from the people to develop policies and programs to meet the human needs of all of the people.

Black people are not exempt from paying taxes at any level in this nation. It is absolutely ludicrous for Black people to walk away from the public sector as if government resources are the exclusive preserve of white people. African Americans are entitled to expect that a government that accepts our taxes will also function to meet the massive human needs of our community. And there is a special obligation for the government to provide remedies for the crippling and debilitating effects of past and present racism, discrimination and economic exploitation and exclusion. Affirmative action and government policies and programs designed to uplift the disadvantaged should be seen as a vital complement to self help development strategies internal to the African American community.

The debate between Black conservatives and Black liberals and progressives on these issues is not frivolous but fundamental. In effect the Black conservative's (and their white counterparts) focus on self-help is tantamount to an apology for the racist, capitalist system in the U.S. White conservatives glorify self-help, but in fact the government in this country has always been conservative and continues to be that "the business of government is business." Big business has never been reluctant to help itself to government resources as a means of promoting and protecting its interest.

The great railroads in this country were not built through a "self-help"

program. The U.S. government gave the railroads huge tracts of land at virtually no cost in order complement their private capital. Turning to more recent history, the 600 billion dollar S&L bail-out could hardly be characterized as a self-help program. Nor were the bail-outs for Chrysler, Continental Bank or the Bank of New England. The multi-billion dollar rip-off of H.U.D. funds by wealthy developers is yet another example of taxpayers dollars going to aid and assist the wealthy. What the conservative self-help philosophy really means is self-help for the masses of Black people, other minorities and poor and working people and massive subsidies (welfare) for the rich and super rich as needed.

Enough of this Horatio Alger nonsense. If the government can bail-out and otherwise subsidize huge corporations and the rich and the super-rich (who pay less of their incomes/profits in taxes than poor and working people and the middle class), then when will the government bail-out Black America and other disadvantaged people in this country? The furious debate generated around the Clarence Thomas nomination is not just a nasty little argument among colored people. It goes to the very heart of the question of the role of government in this society and its relationship to the longstanding aspirations of Africans in America. Will Black people fight to transform the system which has oppressed us and force it to function in the best interest of the masses of the people? Or will the more well off "few" within the African American community join in and become apologists for the present system of oppression which continues to promote and protect the interests of the small elite of the wealthy and the privileged in this country?

and pre-employment training. Participants learn about the world of work through an environment which simulates employers' expectations. For example, students punch a time clock and must conform to a dress code. Staff create links between basic skills and employer's needs.

The Private Industry Council is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to employment and training for low-income youth and adults throughout Washington and Multnomah Counties. Its Youth Employment Institute operates with the cooperation and support of local businesses, Portland Public Schools, the City of Portland, and community organizations.

Racism Rears Its Ugly Head: The Other Form of Hate Crime

To the Editor,

The Milwaukee police officers claimed they saw nothing amiss inside and outside Jeffrey Dahmer's apartment when they brought a naked and bleeding Asian youth, Konerak Sinthasomphone, back to him for disposal. The three officers involved have been suspended with pay but they won't face criminal charges.

In our opinion, this is another form of hate crime, where the racist attitudes of these three officers overwhelmed their sense of duty and good judgement. Otherwise, how could they hand over a scared and hurt naked boy to an adult, obviously not of the same family?

This was done in spite of an African-American neighbor's effort to protect Konerak. Now the Police Chief as well as the police union lawyer are trying to minimize the seriousness of this incident by creating a smoke screen.

Not unlike the ritualistic beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, these actions show the deep-seated insensitivity in much of our law enforcement establishment to the voices of non-white communities.

This kind of behavior and action, intentionally or unintentionally, is breeding the proliferation and maintenance of hate crime in this country. This is the other facet of hate crime: to ignore the voice of a young Asian victim because it is not heard as a human voice.

Charles N.C. Shi, President
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Perspectives

By Professor McKinley Burt

"Glasnost" For American Educators and Publishers

Today's column is a reprint in support of our page seven article, "Russia In Turmoil, The Empire Strikes Back."

The new Russian policy of "glasnost" is defined as openness. May we take this opportunity to demand a forthright expedition of this process at home as well as abroad?

For instance, we need to most immediately develop reading programs and supporting materials that highlight the great Black contributions to the world's finest literature. There is of course the vaunted works of Byron, Yeats, Tennyson, Longfellow and Poe, but what about the magnificent works of the authors of African descent—whose works (with notations of ancestry) would provide motivation and self-imagery for African-American students: Pushkin Dumas(es), Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Robert Browning, and many others.

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837): Today's article is about this African-Russian literary giant who changed the history of Russia (and the world) for all time to come with the passionate humanity of his prose and poetry. In direct relevance is "The Captain's Daughter," a historical novel of epic proportions, a story of the peasant's revolt. In this country and as late as 1940, two of Pushkin's shorter works appeared in

many primary school readers; his most popular poem, "The Fisherman and the Fish" and "The Golden Cockerel," a fairy tale of great beauty and fancy.

Two of his novels were converted into famous operas: "Boris Godunov" (Mussorgski), and "Eugene Onegin" (Tchaikovsky). At the library you will find a most informative article in the "Negro History Bulletin, March 1948; The Negro's Literary Influence on Masterpieces of Music," (pp. 134-137). Also, if you can find it, there is "Pushkin, the Shakespeare of Russia" by Boris Lee Brasol, N.Y., 1931. More recent and of special interest to English teachers developing lesson plans (we hope) is "Pushkin: A Biography," David Magarshack, N.Y., Grove Press, 1967, 1969.

As with many of Europe's geniuses of African descent who influenced the destiny of that continent's affairs, there was in Pushkin a very early maturation of talent. At the age of 12 he entered the Imperial Lycee at St. Petersburg where, incredibly, his passionate outpourings led to his becoming Russia's leading poet at the age of 15. His first poem "Reminiscences of Tsarskoye Selo" was not written in the conventional French of the Russian intellectual circles, but in Russian. Russia had at last a great

poet using her own language; "With one cut of the sword Pushkin had freed Russian literature from the ties that were keeping it enslaved."

The passage below from the "International Library of Negro Life and History (p.111) indicates that Pushkin's powerful pen was a powerful force in the overthrow of the Czars of tyranny, and was crucial to the development of that mindset which blossomed into the Russian Revolution. "Placing the language of his people among the world's most important, Pushkin cried out for freedom and protested bondage and serfdom...became spokesman for the poor and oppressed."

Marx, Lenin, and Kerensky have their due in Russian history, but most of us know that it is first the soul of man which must be reached. Alexander Pushkin did just this in shaping the psyche of the Russian masses without sword or cannon--this great grandson of General Hannibal, the freed African slave who became chief military engineer for Czar, Peter the Great.

Several lines from Pushkin's poem, "Ode to Liberty," says it all:

"Oh shake and shiver, tyrants of the world.
But lend and ear ye fallen slaves
Gain courage and rise."

Countries in Africa May Seek Slave-trade Reparations

BY ALASTAIR MATHESON
LONDON OBSERVER

African nations are discussing whether to seek reparations of perhaps trillions of dollars from Europe for damage done by the slave trade.

Supporters of Nigeria's stance note that Germany had to pay reparations after the two world wars and also compensated the Jewish people for the Holocaust. Some also cite Kuwait's demand for reparations from Iraq.

Not all OAU members back the campaign. The Kenya Times, newspaper of the ruling party, called it "a laughable idea" and suggested that African leaders shouldn't waste time on "trivial pursuits."

Bashorun Abilo, a Nigerian tribal chief who calculates slavery cost the continent \$130 trillion in the loss of people and production potential, is leading the campaign. He says that as many as 140 million Africans were shipped into slavery.

Abilo suggest that unless compensation is paid, Africa is justified in refusing to repay foreign debts amounting to \$270 million, owed largely to Western countries, since Africa's poverty stems largely from slavery and plunder.

Nigeria's frequent attacks on "European colonial powers" presumably refer to Britain, France, Italy, Ger-

many, Belgium, Portugal and/or Spain. Many East Africans are puzzled that Abilo has not targeted oil-rich Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, since Arab traders seized vast numbers of slaves in East Africa.

Almost all of these slaves were shipped to rich potentates in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and other countries on the Arabian peninsula, as well as to Egypt.

Many went through the slave market in Zanzibar even after the European powers outlawed the trade.

Taken from The Detroit News, August 9, 1991.

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Reinvestments in the Community

A special Observer focus THE HEARINGS A special Observer focus

Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, State of Oregon Notice of Hearing on the Proposed Repeal of the Basic Skills Test 9 a.m., July 25, 1990

Exercising the Right to Question Authority

BY ANGELIQUE SANDERS

With the "education president" in office, Oregon State is debating whether teachers need to demonstrate their qualifications through a skills test.

As in making any ludicrous decision such as this one, the capitol saw fit to hold a meeting, inviting any measurable figureheads. At first glance, the meeting promised to be boorish and pointless: the "audience" brought to mind overaged schoolchildren assuming the "attention" stance, yet legitimately hearing nothing. Late-entering visitors were treated with a vacant gaze, like new students in class. I presumed that the obvious conclusion of this meeting--if for no more reason than preventing a disruptive educational backlash--was to conclude, "okay, so we DO need some method of proof that the authorities of education can prove they have more knowledge than the students."

Upon further listening, I found that people were taking this very seriously. One gentleman, Walter Hathaway, Director of Research Evaluation for Portland Public Schools, ridiculed the test by saying something to the effect of, so you don't know a certain algebra trick...does this make you a bad teacher? My response is, probably it

does not, but when your students ask you that same question--that you were unable to answer on the skills test--what will you say? There ARE teachers out there who not only have so-called valid teaching skills, but can also pass a cursory knowledge test. If they cannot, let's question why they're leading our youth.

The very institution--Willamette University--where this meeting was held requires the test. How can teachers have the audacity to test the students constantly, but when the teachers have to prove a certain ability of general knowledge, they can just smile back and say, "Well, I've got a degree, don't I?" Just as there are many illiterate students that are graduated from high schools, similarly there are--and we can all attest to this fact, as we've all been taught by some--teachers that have filtered through any vague testing requirements during college and gone on to educate (or just ramble mindlessly to) the masses. I view the skills test as an additional sieve of poor teachers: while it is not an automatic assurance that a potential educator is qualified, it will help strain out some bad apples (I'll spare you the tired ditty "one bad apple...").

One of the complications of the CBEST is that the records illustrate a higher passing rate for high school students than college students. This, concludes the school district, proves that the test is warped and fallible, not a valid test at all, surely justification for surrendering the test. But what they don't say is, if the test is inadequate, then let's develop a better standard of testing teaching aptitude, instead of dropping the final assessment we have.

Another point the district pushes is that the time limit is ludicrous. Many teachers out there have passed the test in the designated time (not to mention high school students). Are these teachers saying that they cannot pass this type of evaluation that even their students have little trouble with? Who's teaching whom?

In conclusion, I'd like to ask readers the following: firstly, if you were a principal, who would have first hiring priority: a skills test failure or victor? Secondly, if you were a student, how would you feel if you found out your teacher was a failure in a basic skills test? And lastly, if you are a parent, how would you feel about your children being schooled under skills test failures, or teachers that never took one?

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