

# CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

## "Malcolm and Martin": The Good Teachings Of James H. Cone

As hundreds of thousands of people are lining up to see Spike Lee's historic movie on Malcolm X, it is advisable for all communities to take the time to study and try to better understand the legacies of both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Thanks to a recent book by the prolific African American scholar, Dr. James H. Cone, an important contribution has been made toward re-educating the public about the truth of Martin and Malcolm.

In *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*, published by Orbis Books, Professor Cone skillfully analyzes the lives, ministries and living legacies of Martin and Malcolm. Although both of these great leaders were assassinated more than 24 years ago, the impact of their leadership is still felt by millions of people in the nation and throughout the world.

It is not our purpose at this point to take sides in the raging debate at some levels about the historical accuracy of the movie on Malcolm X. Certainly, Spike Lee is to be congratulated for achieving what no other film maker would dare to attempt concerning bringing renewed public attention to one of the gallant giants of the freedom struggle. Notwithstanding all of the overdone commercialization of the "X" image, the fact that generations of people are for the first time being at least introduced to the significance of Malcolm X is cause for renewed hope. Of course, the real hope is that more "Malcolms" will be raised up out of the youth from the increasing masses of those who are oppressed.

Rather, our purpose is to recom-

mend Dr. Cone's book to all of those who really want to know more details and insights about what is the meaning of Malcolm for us today and in the future. Too often in the past, it has been characteristic for writers to portray only the differences between Malcolm and Martin. The divisive treatment and approaches to evaluating Malcolm and Martin have only served to cause unnecessary disunity in the African American community.

Dr. Cone stated, "This book is about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X their relationship to each other and their meanings for America. The 'dream' and 'nightmare' images are used to focus their perspectives on America and to reveal something about the audiences to whom and for whom they spoke."

Reading and listening to the "good teachings" of James H. Cone about the lasting value of both Malcolm and Martin set in a complimentary tension is refreshing, revealing, and revolutionizing. Cone demystifies the falsehoods and stereotypes that have been made about these two freedom fighters. Cone emphasized, "They were like two soldiers fighting their enemies from different angles of vision, each pointing out the others blind spots and correcting the other's errors. They needed each other, for they represented and continue to represent the 'yin and yang' deep in the soul of Black America."

Is it fair or appropriate to measure or evaluate African-American leaders today in comparison to the leadership style and impact of Martin and Malcolm? We say, "Yes, it is imperative to

always be reminded of the kind of leadership that is effective with moral integrity." Cone pointed out that Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. were not elitist in their leadership style. Since their deaths they have been portrayed to have been messiahs, but in life that was not the case. They both knew the importance of mass movement and organization for the causes of justice and freedom. They were not arrogant. Yes, they were forceful, but not disrespectful or drunk with egotism.

Cone concluded, "Thus, it is important to emphasize that Martin and Malcolm, despite the excessive adoration their followers often bestow upon them, were not messiahs. They show us what ordinary people can accomplish through intelligence and sincere commitment to the cause of justice and freedom. There is no need to look for messiahs to save the poor. Human beings can and must do it themselves." We agree with Cone, leadership is important and crucial in the liberation struggle, but there can be no substitute for mass participation in the struggle.

In other words, everyone has a role to play, energy to expend, and a gift of life to share to say "no" to racism and injustice and to say "yes" to freedom and justice. We get inspiration from leaders like Malcolm and Martin. Going to the movies can be educational; but there is also no substitute for consistent study, reflection and then action. In addition to reading the actual writings of Malcolm and Martin, we highly recommend this unique gift in the form of a book that Jim Cone has given to humanity.

# perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt

## Education Update IV: We Tried

We've got some important things to talk about this week (don't we always?). But first, some items that were left out of my quarterly "Oregon Report Card on Education" that appeared at the end of my *Perspective* column for November 25.

You may not have seen that October 26 article in the Community section of the *Oregonian* newspaper, "School Board Rejects Zone Elections Proposal." Our Board of Education turned down a request by the Rainbow Coalition that they diversify electing members by zone rather than the present city-wide process. Given that the board must now redraw its boundaries to account for population shifts, the coalition had felt that it was an opportune time for an effort to gain some minority representation, quite like the redistricting that went on nationally under that Voting Rights Act.

Coalition spokesman, Jamie Partridge said, "There does seem to be an elitist attitude about diversifying the board in terms of race... grassroots access. The board's comments on the need for qualified candidates and the complex nature of the job were code words for you've got to have people just like us." Circumstances like this always bring me back to 1974, the year I was chairperson of the Minority Teachers Organization, but let us go on now, beyond the "Report Card."

Portland's educational process for African Americans was quite bad at the time, just as now, and a number of grassroots activists had engaged the system in combat. My principal idea for a solution that would head off a further disabling of our children was a technique I had learned a few years before in Washington, D.C. While lec-

turing at Howard University, I was introduced to Dr. Julius Hobson, the Black economist who had just successfully sued the Washington D.C. school district. I spent a week with him while he "educated" me in detail how his group had corrected a situation that was just like Portland, only on a megascale. "Hobson vs Board of Education."

Readers, all of this is quite relevant to our scene today, so hear me out. Mr. Hobson had gone about organizing the entire city for the confrontation, but had many "disappointing and frightening" experiences, as some activists and their organizations turned out to be weak-kneed frauds under pressure, and many African American educators fearful of their jobs and condominiums turned on him and joined the side of the "Board". Two major components of Dr. Hobson's coalition came through and carried the day.

First, his cadre of mostly white lawyers, sociologists, economists and anthropologists, psychologists and educationists stood fast, and successfully made the case that a continuation of the "D.C. horror story of disabled intercity schools" should soon lead to further disintegration of the city's social fabric. The reference was to a further increase in undirected, poorly educated and unmotivated dropouts who even then had become a danger to themselves and public safety. Black juvenile gangs and drug mules had begun to take over street corners and housing projects even back then.

The second faithful and dedicated support group enlisted by Dr. Hobson was a medley of grassroots parents and the black school janitors. The latter group was given Polaroid Cameras

which they used to photograph the racist disparity in equipment, books and supplies between the intercity African American schools and the suburban white institutions. Undeniable was the shocking lack of laboratory equipment, modern texts and even decent lighting fixtures in the ghetto.

Now, you may think that I must have been insane to have sought to institute such a process here in Portland. To make a long story short (which I'm sure you would expect to be repeated today), only 3 or 4 of my compatriots in the Minority Teachers' Organization stood fast. These few and the several poverty lawyers and legal aid attorneys I rounded up (all white). Activists, leaders and educators disappeared like the raindrops on your windshield as the project collapsed. Our "Middle class Uncle Toms, Aunt Jemimas and 'Oreos" kept the school board and administration informed of the internal affairs of the organization. Shall we imagine that much has changed today when we contemplate where our youth might be today had we intervened back then? Think about it!

Well, I have put it on your mind how hard it is to get some things done around here. I wouldn't want to see a lot of the old fears and trepidation when calling on folks again. There is a lot that needs to be done and I have put together my own coalition of professionals, industry and just plain people. Hopefully we all have learned a lot and some we hope have learned like "Pogo" - "We have discovered the enemy and he is us." Next week some exciting news and resources about math, science and ongoing programs. And as usual some pitfalls to avoid while enhancing your child's future. Take care!

## Farm Bureau Women Support Sen. Packwood

By unanimous decision, women members of the Oregon Farm Bureau sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell in support of Sen. Bob Packwood regarding allegations about his behavior toward women.

The action was a result of a women's advisory council meeting during the 59th annual meeting of the 11,000-member Oregon Farm Bureau here today and had the support of the entire delegation in attendance.

The letter read as follows: "We are a group of Oregon women who want to express our outrage at the treatment that Senator Bob Packwood is receiving and to ask for your assistance in bringing balance to this situation."

"In Oregon, groups that supported Senator Packwood's opponent in the recent election have used unproven allegations of sexual misconduct to call for his resignation or for strong action by the Senate Ethics Committee. These groups, which have been allied with Senator Packwood in the past due to his leader-

ship on women's issues, are angry over the loss suffered by Congressman Les AuCoin to Packwood in November. They are attempting to use these unrelated charges as an excuse to get 'another bite at the apple.'

"While these people agree with Packwood on most feminist issues, they strongly disagree with him on other issues such as health care, defense spending, and natural resource use. Because of these disagreements, and because of their failure at the polls, they are now calling for Packwood's resignation using these allegations."

"There is also a distressing double standard at work here. Other senators have behaviors and problems that are much worse than anything alleged against Packwood. Senator Daniel Inouye has been accused of molesting ten women. Senator Ted Kennedy has been associated in the death of one woman and covered up his involvement in the recent sex scandal at his Florida residence. When will the Ethics Com-

mittee begin an investigation of these charges?"

"We need to have perspective. Is Senator Packwood's uninvited kissing of nine women—if it occurred—really worse than Senator Kennedy's conduct in the incident involving Mary Jo Koepchne? Is Senator Packwood's kissing of nine women really worse than Senator Inouye's alleged physical molestation of ten women?"

"We are heading for a modern witch hunt, in which men and women will be subject to losing their jobs over unsupported, unproven allegations of sexual misconduct. Our constitution guarantees citizens of the United States due process under the law. Apparently, Packwood's political opponents do not believe that this basic right applies to Bob Packwood. They have judged him guilty without evidence and are now trying to hang him without trial. We call on you to do the right thing and bring perspective and balance to this outrageous miscarriage of justice."

## This Way for Black Empowerment MALCOLM X, REVOLUTIONARY

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

I hope you're planning to see *Malcolm X*, the Spike Lee movie based on Malcolm's autobiography, and to take kids. I think Spike did a great job in portraying Malcolm's life. It's our job to introduce our young people to Malcolm, the revolutionary, and to teach them what it means to be one—which is being where you have to be (not where you want to be, or where the powers-that-be allow you to be). All the little controversies over the movie have merely served to stifle dialogue on this issue, which is of fundamental importance to our people.

Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York is a case in point.

For the last 40 years, Crown Heights has been home to two communities. The majority are Black, mostly Caribbean Jews, most of whom are members of the Hasidic sect known as the Lubavitchers. Although both communities are poor, the Lubavitchers have a lot of political clout in city politics; as a result, they get all kinds of special consideration, from scarce apartments in the public housing projects to a regular police escort (at taxpayers' expense) for their 90-year-old religious leader, known as the Rebbe.

A little over a year ago, the driver of a car in the Rebbe's entourage ran a red light, struck another vehicle, then lost control of his car, which jumped the curb and careered onto the sidewalk where a seven-year-old Black child, Gavin Cato, and his cousin, Angela, were playing.

Gavin's head was crushed beneath the wheels. Angela was pinned between the bumper and the wall of the apartment building behind them. Gavin died immediately. A crowd quickly gathered, so there were many eye-witnesses to what happened next—which is that the police hustled the driver and his two passengers, none of whom were seriously hurt, into the private Lubavitcher ambulance that had arrived on the scene (the excuse was that they were in dan-

ger from the crowd). It wasn't until a city ambulance finally showed up that the two children, one dead and the other badly injured, were taken to the hospital.

By the evening, Crown Heights had become a war zone, with roving gangs of Black and Hasidic youth attacking one another. One young Jewish man, Yankel Rosenbaum, a visiting rabbinical student from Australia was stabbed; he died in the hospital later that night. The media headlined Yankel's death as a "revenge killing" and the police soon obliged with a young Black suspect, 17-year-old Lemrick Nelson, Jr. Although no one else was killed, the violence went on for four days.

Last month, a Brooklyn jury acquitted Lemrick Nelson, Jr. of murdering Yankel Rosenbaum; the prosecution's case against him, based primarily on secondary evidence and riddled with inconsistent testimony from police witnesses, just didn't stand up.

Conservative and right-wing Jewish leaders are using the verdict as an opportunity to malign David Dinkins, the city's first Black mayor, who is up for re-election next year. The right-wing Zionists are screaming that Dinkins "held back the police" in Crown Heights. It's true. Left to their own devices, the cops would gladly have blown off a few Black heads that night. I know. I was there—not because anyone wanted me to be or had invited me to be, but because that was where I had to be. I believe that if I, along with the other Black leaders who were in Crown Heights that night, hadn't been there, a bloodbath might well have taken place.

The hundreds of young Black men in the streets weren't out to "get the Jews"—they were reacting to the cops (all of them in riot gear and heavily armed) who were itching for an excuse to open fire. For hours I was in the streets with those young men, each of whom could have been my son, talking

a combination of a Black mother's common sense and independent politics to them (which they were in no mood to hear). Meanwhile, I kept sending word to Dinkins to restrain the cops. So did Reverend Sharpton and the other leaders who were there. Our presence did act as a barrier between the police and the kids.

The Zionists know as well as I do that there was no anti-Semitic pogrom in Crown Heights; there was an explosion of long-simmering tensions between the two communities. Moreover, the Black community responded by exercising its power through the new coalition of Black leadership that has emerged in the city, which had the political muscle to tell New York's Black mayor to call off his dogs. And that's what the Zionists are so angry about—once again there are Black leaders who will go wherever we have to be.

In the eyes of the powers-that-be in America (and those who serve them), such Black leaders are extremely dangerous. That's why, whenever there have been Black leaders who moved to provide revolutionary leadership to all people, they have been destroyed: Malcolm X, Dr. King, the Black Panthers.

You see, the powers-that-be don't care if Black leaders stay in the Black community and preach anti-white doctrine until the day they die, because that doesn't put the Black community in the position to radically change things. (No one ever touched Malcolm while he was preaching that white people were devils.) But a charismatic Black leader who is able to lead other people besides Blacks—revolutionary Black leadership which, while never compromising the Black community, reaches beyond it and provides Black leadership to a multi-racial movement—such a leader is feared by the elite because that's the kind of movement which can change America.

Take your kids to see *Malcolm X* and fill them in on what it means to be a Black revolutionary in America.

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