

perspectives

What's In A Word?II: Shakespeare And The Africans Knew

Shakespeare was making the point that words mean nothing where love is concerned—the family names of Romeo and Juliet, respectively, the Montagues and the Capulets. However, as we saw last week, the names of people, places and things can prove quite important when we try to reconstruct the true history of mankind's past.

Last week we cited a book by Roland Wilbur Brown, "Composition Of Scientific Words". While the book was purchased for the purpose of devising names in the traditional manner for new scientific concepts or species, the text proved to be a treasure house of cultural, ethnic and political history. As the author traced the origin and development of the words ("etymology") western civilization has inherited primarily from Greek and Latin roots, we were able to see that the 'English' language has been enriched by additions from other cultures; for instance, African (also Arabic).

The other book I mentioned that yields some interesting exercises in comparative linguistics was Anta Diop's, "The African Origin of Civilization". There follow some quotations from the very informative book by this great African Scholar (and he makes a good case for many other contributions from Africa).
 "As already indicated, it would be most helpful to have a systematic study of the roots that passed from Negro languages (Egyptian and others) to Indo-European languages throughout the period of their contact. Two principles could guide us in such a study: 1. The anteriority of civilization and forms of social organization in Negro countries, such as Egypt; 2. The fact that a word expressing an idea of social organization or some other cultural aspect, may be common to Egyptian and to Latin or Greek, without appearing in other languages of the

Indo-European family. For example: Maka: veteran, in Egyptian. Mag: veteran, venerable, in Wolof.

Kay Mag: he who is great, venerable, in Wolof.
 Kaya Magan: the great, king. This term served to designate the Emperor of Ghana from the third century to approximately 1240. The language was Sarakole (or a neighboring tongue). In any event, it was obviously related to Wolof.

Magna: great, in Latin: the Latins did not count in history before 500 B.C.
 Carle Magnus: Charlemagne. Charles the Great, first emperor of the West.

Mega: great, in Greek. The root Magnus is not found in the vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic languages except as an obvious borrowing from Latin.

Mac: Scottish proper name.
 Kora: musical instrument in West Africa; Choeur: chant, in Greek.
 Ra, Re: Egyptian god, symbolized by the sun, title of the Pharaoh.
 Rog: celestial Serer god whose voice is the thunder.

Rex: king, in Latin which in the Romance language, becomes re, rey, roi, whereas in the Anglo-Germanic we have only king or Koning."

"All things considered, when the Nazis say that the French are Negroes, if we disregard the perprejorative intention of that affirmation, it remains well-founded historically, insofar as it refers to those contacts between peoples in the Aegean epoch. But that is true not only of the French; it is even more applicable to the Spaniards, Italians, Greeks, etc., all those populations whose completion, less white than that of other Europeans, has wishfully been attributed to their southern habitat. What is false in Nazi propaganda is the claim of racial superiority, but certainly the blue-eyed blond Nordic race has been the least mixed since the fourth glaciation. These Nazi

theories prove what I said about the insincerity of the specialists. They show, in fact, that the Black influence on the Mediterranean is no secret for any scholar: they pretend to be unaware of it, yet use it when they feel so inclined."

There is much, much more to be learned here and Mr. Diop reminds us of certain Biblical connections. "Returning to the question of whether the Bible designated Ham's descendants and the Egyptians by a term indicating their skin color, we can answer affirmatively. The very name 'Ham' (Cham) is an ethnic term:

In Hebrew, Khanm: son of Noah
 Khum: Chestnut
 Khom: heat
 Khama: heat, the sun
 In Ancient Egyptian, Khem: black, burned
 Ham: hot, black
 West African (Wolof), Khem: black, burned"

As Diop develops well documented 'dictionaries' and etymologies of African languages and compares them to similar renditions of Middle Eastern, European and Asian languages, we can well understand why the racists among white scholars are so busy digging up the most shaky—and poorly documented—'evidence' for a protoaryan origination of the world's languages (read some of the almost hilarious articles by white linguists appearing in the pages of Scientific American magazine). All attempting to disprove the contention by that great black historian, W.E.B. Dubois—that even in prehistory the "Negroid races" are found to have settled all over the world. Diop gives us this, noting black Eskimos and African names.

"Loto: canoe, in Wolof, and in North American Indian languages (as in Sara and Baguirmian).

Tul: name of a city in Snegal.
 Tule: name of an Eskimo land, German song.

Tula: name of a city in Mexico.
 Inuit: men, in Eskimo (of Gessain. Les Esquimaux du Groenland a l'Alaska, p.5).

Init, Ai-nit: men, in Wolof."



by Professor McKinley Burt

VANTAGE POINT

by Ron Daniels

Charting A New Course For The NAACP: The Expectations And Challenges Facing Ben Chavis

Dr. Benjamin S. Chavis, the new Executive Director of the NAACP, wasted no time in demonstrating the kind of course which he intends to chart for the Association. With the whole nation awaiting the verdict in the second Rodney King beating trial, Chavis immediately went to Los Angeles to plea for justice and peace. But instead of setting up his temporary headquarters in a posh downtown hotel, Dr. Chavis went directly to the "hood" and stayed in a housing project in Watts. Unlike the cosmetic pass throughs for photo opportunities that the Black masses have become accustomed to from their "leaders," the Chavis visit to the Watts symbolized a sincere commitment to address the concerns of Black poor and working people and Black youth at the grassroots level.

From the vantage point of the "hood," the new Executive Director of the NAACP began to articulate a new vision for an organization which has less touch with the most desperately disadvantaged people in the Black community. While he appealed for calm, his emphasis was on the critical issue of jobs and economic justice. As he strode with Black youth, including gang bangers, through the neighborhoods of South Central, he repeatedly condemned the "Desert Storm" type military/police presence surrounding impoverished communities and neglected, abandoned people. With the people at his side, Dr. Chavis warned America that while it could mobilize a massive police presence to forestall yet another rebellion, America had failed to mobilize the resources to insure a just and lasting peace in the South Central of this nation.

The images were not lost on the Black people of south Central, Black people across the country and the nation in general. Here was a thoughtful, caring, dynamic new leader of the

NAACP standing with and fighting for the Black masses. Remarkably, in a neighborhood where the name of the NAACP is hardly a household word, NAACP sweatshirts were eagerly snapped up by grassroots people grateful that finally there is a leader who understands and shares their agony, pain and aspirations.

Ben Chavis hit the ground running, and his new mold of leadership is already engendering very high expectations about the prospects for real change with the charting of a new direction for the NAACP. It is not just his historic stay in Watts that has fueled such high expectations. Within days of being selected as the new Executive Director of the NAACP, Chavis was busy meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus to explore the possibilities of a Black Summit to develop an agenda for Black advancement. In this regard, Chavis also expressed his resolve to work to create coalitions and alliances with other people of color to advance a common agenda for oppressed people. He went on the offensive urging Congressional approval of President Clinton's economic stimulus package which contains funds for Summer jobs for youth and renewed the call for full employment to eradicate the staggering unemployment in Black communities like South Central L. A.

Reacting to the assassination of ANC leader Chris Hani, Chavis fired off a telegram of condolence to the family and the ANC and pledged the continuing support of the NAACP for the liberation struggle in South Africa. And to underscore his commitment to a new priority on the problems of African American youth, Dr. Chavis attended the Gang Summit held in Kansas City, Mo. and expressed his determination to uphold the peace by fighting for economic justice for broth-

ers and sisters in the "hood."

As I recently watched Dr. Chavis address an enthusiastic audience at the Medger Evers College in Brooklyn, there was no question in my mind but that here was a man who is dedicated to charting a new course for the NAACP. The response to his address was electric, filled with hope and expectations for a revitalized NAACP. While accepting the warm embrace of the audience, however, Chavis cautioned those assembled that the challenge of charting a new direction for the NAACP and breathing new life into the Black freedom struggle was too awesome for them to bear alone. He exhorted those who want to see the Association reinvigorated to become engaged in the process. In effect Dr. Chavis was saying that this was not his struggle, but our struggle.

This was an entirely appropriate note for Dr. Chavis to sound. Though he is off to a very good start, the task of reshaping the NAACP will be formidable. In the first instance we should be aware that not everyone inside the organization was pleased with the selection of Dr. Chavis. No doubt his detractors will be watching and waiting for him to stumble. Chavis also inherits an organization which is straddled with a fairly substantial debt. And even under ideal circumstances, the transition in terms of gaining a solid familiarity with the existing staff, hiring new staff where necessary and developing good working relations with the Board of Directors will take time.

Having known Dr. Chavis for many years, I am confident that he is up to these challenges. However, the challenge facing all of us who are eager to see the NAACP chart a new course is to understand that it is really the people who make change and make history, not individual leaders. Hence, it is incumbent upon us to provide maximum support, to take ownership of the process, and be patient as Dr. Benjamin S. Chavis stands shoulder to shoulder with us in charting a new course for the NAACP.

This Is My Story

Letter To The Editor

I am a 34 year old black male who has been unsuccessfully looking for work since December, 1991, when I was released from a correctional facility. It's very frustrating to be a serious job seeker and not be able to find work. Most companies in Portland say (and say this very proudly) that they are "Equal Opportunity Employers". I have yet to experience the equal opportunity they speak of. It's discouraging to apply for a position that I qualify for, interview and then not get the job because: 1) I'm black, 2) I'm a felon, and 3) being forced to work many temporary positions to live has given me a sporadic work history. Employers don't come right out and say these reasons are why I'm not hired, but I'm sure this is what's happening. I've had many employers say

"Don't call us, we'll call you." - I'm still waiting for those calls.

When companies speak of how hard it is to find good people to work for them, especially minorities, I become very frustrated knowing that if I and others in my position were to apply, our applications would be filed in the trash.

I would cherish an opportunity to prove myself, to show that I have much to contribute to a company, and be able to do a good day's work for a day's wages. I am trying desperately to stay out of jail, get a decent job with benefits, and be able to live a normal life.

Will anyone offer me a chance for that "Equal Opportunity" as they say? Sincerely,
 James Carr, Jr.

Oregon's Lottery Results

Oregon Megabucks
 Wednesday 5/19/93
 09 10 36 14 04 27
 Saturday 5/22/93
 14 18 41 21 17 06

Oregon Powerball
 Wednesday 5/19/93
 24 12 31 38 35 PB 08
 Saturday 5/22/93 26
 36 07 18 31 PB 39

The Fight For Democracy Is The Fight Against Racism

BY DR. LENORA FULANI

When I ran an independent campaign for the presidency in 1988 and became the first African American and the first woman ever in United States history to get on the ballot in every state, it was probably the first moment that I truly grasped how obstinate and undemocratic our ballot access laws actually are. That year I had to gather some 1.5 million signatures in comparison to roughly 40-50,000 required for the Democrat and the Republican. My attorneys had to go to court more than a dozen times—in some cases building on litigation initiated by John Anderson in his 1980 presidential bid in order to secure a place on the ballot. In 1992 when representatives of Ross Perot's presidential campaign contacted my office to find out if 50-state access was actually possible and how the hell we had done it, believe me, we had quite a story to tell them.

The Fair Elections Bill, just reintroduced into Congress by Rep. Timothy Penny of Minnesota as part of a three-bill democracy package he has assembled, redresses the most basic inequities in ballot access for independents seeking federal office. Given that the American people have made abundantly clear that they want more choices—including choices other than Democrats or Republicans—this legislation couldn't come at a better time.

In both 1988 and 1992 I was barred from participation in major televised primary and general election debates. The legal and political controversy that evolved from that exclusion focused congressional and public attention on very critical aspects of the national debate process; most particularly on the lack of objective criteria for the inclusion of significant independents and the lack of any accountability to the public regarding the responsibility of major party candidates to participate in debates. Congressman Penny's Democracy in Presidential Debates bill tackles these two deficiencies in our demo-

cratic process.

Finally, the barriers to insurgent and independent candidates are mirrored by the barriers which prevent American citizens from participating fully in the political process. Congressman Penny's same-day voter registration bill would simply cut through the elaborate and bureaucratic red tape that has been erected by state legislatures around the country and make the activity of voting more directly connected to election day itself. This is most critical to giving voters the opportunity to use elections as the Constitution intended—as an exercise in the expression of the will of the people. I just spent the last two weeks in Los Angeles, where a mayoral election was held four days after the verdict in the Rodney King case. The voters, particularly in the Black and Latino communities, are deeply alienated from the political process. How important it would be to the healing and rebuilding of L.A. if voters—particularly young voters—were able to go to the polls on election day to both register and vote!

I think a great deal of credit is due to Congressman Penny for pursuing these three bills with such tenacity, but I think the significance of the legislation goes well beyond the particular restructuring they would effect. Because we see in the coalition of forces supporting this package—including John Anderson, the Libertarians, Connecticut Governor Lowell Weicker, the Patriot Parties spawned by the Perot movement, and the New Alliance Party—an unusual alliance which signals, in my opinion, a very positive and explosive change in American politics. It is not common for a Black woman radical independent such as myself and a Minnesota Congressman who is part of the "fiscal conservative" wing of the Democratic Party to have a shared agenda—but we do. In fact, some so-called liberal Democratic Congressmen have refused to endorse the legislation because they said they did not want to

align with the fiscal conservatives in their party. But in my view and, I believe, in the view of the 20 million Americans who cast ballots for Ross Perot and other independent presidential candidates last year, those labels and traditional political categories are becoming obsolete. Instead, Americans from very diverse communities who have long been in conflict with each other are coming together to restructure the political process and redefine the role of government as the guarantor of the right of the people to democratically rule.

Over the last half-century the power of corporate PACs, of lobbyists and of the two major parties themselves has grown explosively. The Democrats and Republicans have become instruments of self-preservation and self-perpetuation, rather than of the right of the people to self-govern. Congressman Penny's legislation takes a bold step in the direction of the sweeping political restructuring necessary in order to empower the American people.

As an African American I am keenly committed to the principle that the fight against racial intolerance and injustice is intrinsically connected to the fight for more democracy. The debate over slavery in America turned on the very issue of whether the democratic rights of human beings took precedence over the right of business and financial interests. America has a long and tortured history on this matter which is still unresolved. The political and economic conditions of African Americans and people of color remain fundamentally second class, and I believe that the structural inequities which preserve racial bias in America must and will be reorganized by the kind of initiative being taken by Congressman Penny. In that light, I think it is important that the most aggressive and enthusiastic support for the Penny legislation come from the Congressional Black Caucus.

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