

EDITORIAL

Civil Rights Journal perspectives

Environmental Racism Is Alive And Well

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

IN MANY PLACES AN ADDRESS TELLS A LOT ABOUT A PERSON.

Having a Beverly Hills address or a Scarsdale address has been seen by some as a way of showing status and income, for example. Well, in East St. Louis, Illinois, a Trendley Avenue address might mean something quite different. It might mean you are facing an early death from cancer.

Trendley Avenue is directly behind the Lanson Chemical plant, where 6,000 gallons of toxic wastes were dumped into the ground following a fire at the plant. In the past few years at least 25 residents of Trendley Avenue have died from cancer and other are living with the disease. Indeed, very few homes on Trendley Avenue have not been touched by cancer. The residents, some of whom have lived in their well-maintained homes since the late 1950's, are understandably very frightened and angry.

The most disturbing fact is that Trendley Avenue is only one of 23 toxic waste sites already identified in east St. Louis, a city of some 40,000 residents, 99 percent of whom are African American. "We have reason to believe there are at least another 18 sites and possibly 23 toxic waste sites not yet identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)," said Rev. Buck Jones, Executive Director of Project HOPE, which has worked in East St. Louis for the past 234 years.

East St. Louis in many ways symbolizes environmental racism at its worst. Located across the Mississippi

River from St. Louis, this African American city has an overwhelming number of problems to overcome. The city itself has been almost bankrupt for many years, 52 percent of the population is officially unemployed, and the only revenue bases which the city has are property taxes and income from the new casino gambling boats which are docked there. There are an estimated 3,000 abandoned buildings in East St. Louis, raw sewage often backs up into one of the large public housing developments. Even last month the high school had to close when sewage backed up into the cafeteria's kitchen once again. And then there are the environmental problems. The giant chemical plants of Monsanto, Big River Zinc and other chemical and waste incineration plants loom menacingly only a few feet beyond the borders of East St. Louis. There have been so many emissions from some of the plants through the years that they have had to install a public warning system to inform nearby residents when such accidents occur. Meanwhile, an enormous metal shredding company shreds not only cars, causing explosions when the unremoved gasoline tanks rupture, but also scrap metal and refrigerated box cars, probably releasing toxic wastes into the air. In another part of town, 40 shipments of hazardous materials travel by rail everyday, including missile fuel for Trident submarines. The rail yard is only a few blocks from homes and children playing in the street.

Yes, there are children in east St. Louis. The children playing on the playground of the Miles Davis elementary school are probably unaware

of the lead poisoning which many of them may have, sometimes causing permanent brain damage and other disorders. The children are the real victims of the neglect, the greed and the racism which are the causes of the problems of East St. Louis.

But even in the midst of the many problems of East St. Louis there is hope. Project HOPE, which has already built 8 Habitat for Humanity homes there, is building 8 new ones. Sponsored by the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, which has raised funds from several corporations along with their members' donations, these homes will all be located on one street and serve as tangible proof that people of East St. Louis have not been totally abandoned by the rest of the world.

East St. Louis' new mayor, Gordon Bush, feels that the federal government is also showing signs that it has not abandoned East St. Louis either. "We are receiving real cooperation from the federal government now," he said recently, pointing to a million dollar grant for new police officers and to a reduction in the amount which the city owes to the internal Revenue Service for back payroll taxes.

Across the Mississippi River, only a few hundred yards away, the Gateway Arch and the skyline of the city of St. Louis rise like the fabled city of Oz. But there are no emerald-colored glasses for the people of East St. Louis. To visit East St. Louis is to feel our abandonment of the cities. To visit East St. Louis is to see our country's contemporary form of racism. This country can do better. We must.

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

1965 Voting Rights Act

Legal Implications: "Undermining Equal Representation"

SHAW V. RENO

WHEN SAW V. RENO WAS DECIDED, TOO MANY IN THE VOTING RIGHTS COMMUNITY INITIALLY SOUGHT TO CHARACTERIZE IT AS A NARROW DECISION WHICH, WHILE POTENTIALLY DAMAGING, WAS NOT AN ATTACK ON THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965.

The NRC, from the beginning, was very concerned about this opinion because we viewed it as a signal that it would encourage those opposed to the Voting Rights Act to challenge it everywhere. That is exactly what has happened following Shaw.

Voting rights, and the LAW protecting those rights, were one of the few areas to emerge largely intact following the Reagan/Bush onslaught. In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled in

City of Mobile v. Bolden that plaintiffs in voting rights cases must first prove intentional discrimination on the part of the state to succeed in a Voting Rights Act case, Congress Disagreed With The Supreme Court's ruling in Bolden and in 1982 amended the Voting Rights Act to specifically overrule that decision. In fact, Congress strengthened the Voting Rights Act on a bipartisan basis to make it plain that discrimination against minority voters continued to persist and that the important test was not "intent", which is often difficult to prove, but instead was the "effect" on minority voters. In 1986, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the 1982 amendments in Thornburg v. Gingles, and it was against this background that state legislatures determined that the Constitution required that majority-minority districts be drawn to avoid violating the LAW.

The Shaw decision has resurrected the "intent" question by turning the Voting Rights Act on its head in order to recognize the right of white plaintiffs to challenge districts that were intended in the first place to lead to greater minority representation. Shaw, like City of Richmond v. Croson (the economic setaside case), ignores the historical fact of racial discrimination in order to give white plaintiffs standing to challenge districts designed to overcome centuries of prior discrimination in political representation. The 5th Circuit decision in Hayes v. Louisiana seeks to apply Shaw to answer the question. "Is there a compelling state interest in designing CDs--using race as one of many criteria--so that racial minorities have an equal opportunity of winning?" The court in Hayes concluded that the Louisiana plan (and Rep. Cleo Field's 4th CD in particular) was not narrowly tailored to further a compelling state interest.

Hayes is troubling for a number of reasons. To recognize the standing of white citizens to attack majority-minority districts, the court cites Regents of the U. of California v. Bakke (1978), in addition to Shaw and Croson. Thus, the "fact" of a "color blind" constitution and country has been elevated by Hayes to strike down the Louisiana plan. The Hayes court relied on a 1964 decision, Wright v. Rockefeller--decided Before the Voting Rights Act of 1965--to define a racially gerrymandered districting plan as one that "intentionally" draws one or more districts along racial lines plan as one that "intentionally" draws one or more districts along racial lines or otherwise segregates citizens into voting districts based on their race. The court also cites Bolden in support of this point. The Hayes court seems to have ignored the fact that the 1982 Amendments overturned Bolden. The only citation the court makes of those Amendments is to assert that Section 2 expressly declares that proportional representation is not required.

That Health Care Agenda Continued

LET US TAKE A DIFFERENT APPROACH THIS WEEK AND EXPLORE SOME ELEMENTS OF HEALTH CARE NOT USUALLY GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC PURVIEW.

As in the case of most government programs impacting the African American Community, it is the participation of blacks at the grassroots level that is key to success or failure.

Now, I got involved in this process quite a while back, exactly twenty years ago when I solicited and obtained a hundred thousand dollar grant to involve and direct minority college students in the health sciences. The scope was quite broad, involving workstudy type placements with hospitals, clinics, nursing schools, laboratories, social agencies and similar components of the delivery system. They received salary and such amenities as transportation, school supplies and mentorship.

I am citing this 90% successful program for several reasons. As you might have guessed, I have been working on the development of a much bigger and more comprehensive program to meet today's needs -- to be fully structured and financed by the end of the year. In the manner I have repeatedly used to successfully secure grants for programs to benefit this community, I first ran several demonstration projects initiated and financed by no one but myself.

This 'model' was developed at Providence Medical Center where I gained the assistance of the administration and personnel of the various departments which would supervise the high school students I selected for work study. But it is important to emphasize that I first gained the respect and commitment of the institution by putting in hundreds of hours as a volunteer in every phase of the medical delivery system. My reason for describing these techniques will become obvious next week as we describe some of the inept or greedy hustlers who exploit the social program scene (and block the unsuspect-

ing) as with some Minority Business Programs.

Since there was almost a twenty year hiatus between my 1974 federal health program (Metropolitan Steering Committee umbrella) and my

Providence program there was a need to run a small program to evaluate community needs and responses. And, of course, it was necessary to determine the contemporary attitude of the medical community -- form practitioners to insurers. In 1974 there was no aid, assistance or recognition from either real or self-styled community leaders or activists. In that earlier program I recruited students from the classes (unrelated) I taught at the university and I would ride the bus to contact youth whom it would be difficult to engage otherwise (I got a lot of derisive comments about that from alleged leaders or activists, too cute and too sophisticated to interact with the people -- for some, it is still that way).

Other preconditioning occurs when one seeks to elicit the support of legislative and congressional representatives. In the design of this most recent effort I sought the input of several of these people. Now, I had been forewarned of some possible problems in this area, because at the Observer Newspaper we get African American papers from all over the nation. Time and again we read bitter complaints that some Democratic politicians, white or black, show a degree of a neglect or a I've-got-it-made attitude toward their black constituency. Like, "who else you gonna vote for, sucker?"

Now, I don't work without friends, contacts and supporters -- a constituency of my own if you will. In my organization, the Association of Oregon Industries, there is as in most organizations a tendency for small, regional, informal groups to evolve around mutual interests or purely social cohesions. I frequently discuss my health care intentions or designs with this constituency of businessmen and executives (all white, since there is only one other black member

in the state of Oregon -- Coast Industries).

I get a very attentive reception for two reasons. First, my enterprises are about the 'real world' and have been demonstrated to work. Second, many members are sons and daughters of my business accounting and federal tax court clients of the late 1940s and early 1950s; contractors, car dealers, retailers, ect. They have inherited and expanded the corporations and are interested in urban and socioeconomic affairs.

Now, in respect to Democratic politicians, I announced at one of our little roundtable meetings last year that I felt rather upbeat about my new health program because I had a good talk with our Democratic representative (sometimes called "Mr Health Care") and he had assured me the cooperation of his staff in my endeavors. I was forecasting excellent result, since as a young man the congressman in question was on the staff of Senator Wayne Morse whose dedication to "the people" was legendary. Unfortunately, I had to report at our last meeting that in the intervening months I have received exactly zilch -- nothing.

Back in 1968 and 1969 the staff of Senator Morse had the mailman walking bowlegged from the weight of all those patents of black inventions and other research that made it possible for me to impact the nation with African American contribution. In 1970 and 1971, Republican Senator Bob Packwood opened up the doors of every federal agency in Washington remotely related to my endeavors and I went from his office to the length and breadth of Pennsylvania Avenue. Agency heads directed me to resources.

One of the local businessmen posed an interesting and 'loaded' question. He wanted to know were there any blacks on the Democrats staff? Seems he was on the board of a local foundation and had discovered that some blacks belong to little incestuous groups that try to control the community by interposing themselves between other blacks and the white establishment. Shame!

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

Farrakhan Speaks Out On Independent Politics

BY DR. LENORA FULANI
WAS HONORED ON FEBRUARY 27 TO BE A GUEST AT THE NATIONAL ISLAM'S SAVIOR'S DAY CELEBRATION IN CHICAGO.

Minister Louis Farrakhan's address at the event was heard by more than 10,000 people at the Pavilion at the University of Illinois, and by hundreds of thousands of others throughout the United States, the Caribbean and West Africa via satellite transmission.

This was the first Savior's Day since the white establishment conceded--ever so reluctantly--that Minister Farrakhan is the most popular Black leader in America. "This is not a 'ministry of rage,'" Farrakhan told the world, referring to the title of the Time magazine cover story about him, which had hit the newsstands a few days earlier. "This is a ministry of love and divine truth. Why don't you tell the truth?... What got you enraged is that Farrakhan is becoming the rage of Black people, that Black people are lifting their hearts to this brother."

The next morning Minister Farrakhan joined me on the popular morning talk show hosted by Cliff Kelly on WVON, Chicago's leading Black radio station, to discuss independent politics. I believe it was a very important program because it gave the Minister, who is primarily a religious leader, a chance to peak out on independent politics--the cutting-edge political issue of our times.

I kicked off the show by talking about the prospects for our working with Ross Perot's base of independent white voters in the emerging independent movement, and the necessity of breaking with the Democrats and voting independent.

I pointed to a study by Michael Dawson of the University of Chicago, which found that over half the Black

community supports the idea of an independent Black political party. When you put that together with a Time/CNN poll which reveals that 70% of the African American community views Minister Farrakhan as "someone who says things the country should hear," with 67% calling him an "effective leader" and 62% calling him "good for the Black community," it indicates that there is a major shift underway in the political attitudes of our people.

"I watched Ross Perot," Farrakhan told our WVON radio audience. "He tapped into the vein of the great dissatisfaction in the white American voter. When it was election time, I watched them [the politicians] going to Perot like Muslim pilgrims go to Mecca. They all sought his support. I don't know what deals went down, but he could leverage the millions [of voters] that he had for some concessions from the Democratic Party, the party that was to be in power."

Minister Farrakhan then called on the African American people to consider the example of the Perot voters: "If the Democratic Party won't speak to the needs of our people and the Republican Party won't, then I don't see any reason why Black people shouldn't form a third party. We get most of these whites elected. We are the balance of power in many of these elections. I am not a political expert at all, in fact I'm a little out of my field to even address this, but I believe a third party united could leverage its weight in the big elections to extract from the main parties what we could never get by just voting for the democratic Party.

"The Reverend Jackson brought more new voters into the Democratic Party than any other votergetter in their history," Minister Farrakhan pointed out. "So the Reverend Jackson could be a key player in a move

like that, if he would. If he did, instead of getting to give a speech on the floor of the convention, maybe we could wring out of that party some real concessions that would be beneficial to the advancement of Black people."

What is a already tremendously beneficial to the advancement of Black people is Minister Farrakhan's increasing willingness to shoulder the burden of political leadership. The escalating attacks on the Minister in recent months have taken place precisely because he has emerged as a political power. It's not a role he has sought. He's a spiritual leader. But the Democratic Party has taken us for granted and disrespected us for nearly two decades now and the political fight is being forced on the Black community, and therefore on the Minister, by those--Black and white--who benefit from the status quo.

As I told our radio listeners: There is growing support in the African American community for independent Black leadership as opposed to the Black establishment. That's a very critical development. Independent Black leadership in America is very diverse. Obviously Minister Farrakhan and I are very different. Reverend Al Sharpton and I are very different. But with all our diversity, we've been able to work together; that, I think, is our strength. We've each taken the independent road--independent of the Democrats, independent of the Republicans, independent of the Anti-Defamation League and corporate America. This is a moment when our people can use that independence to reap all kinds of benefits.

Just how Minister Farrakhan chooses to use his increasing political power will have a tremendous impact not only on the African American community, not only on Black-Jewish relations, but on the course of American history.

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