EDITORIALS

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THE VOICE OF BLACK AMERICA SINCE 1892

A day to give thanks

Through the years, the meaning of Thanksgiving Day has undergone change to such an extent that the original meaning of the day has become almost completely obscured.

The primary focus for Thanksgiving Day should be the reaffirmation of familial fealty. Studies have shown that the disintegration of the black family structure is one of the causative factors in the high incidence of disturbed youth.

Giving thanks is the function of the day, and doing it together is the way to best accomplish this.

Happy Thanksgiving Day from the AFRO family to your family.

Samuel Banks
Educator

Knowledge as power

Throughout the long history of the world community, knowledge has served as a lever for change and demonstrable power. If you wish to share power in our society, whether you like it or not, you must be able to talk the language of the controlling or majority group. Standard English is a must in terms of this process.

It is, to be sure, a national disgrace that over twenty-three (23) million Americans are functionally illiterate.

That means that they are unable to perform such simple processes as reading street signs, menus for meals, names of buildings and related tasks. Black and Hispanic Americans are disproportionately represented among the functionally illiterate across the nation.

To the extent that persons are unable to read, compute and think and speak clearly and effectively in a technological society, he/she is viewed as a societal cripple or impotent.

Black churches, fraternal groups, sororities, civic groups and blacks who have achieved a measure of economic and educational success in concert with the public schools, must become active and dynamic advocates of our own.

A failure to act with dispatch and resoluteness will mean that another generation of black Americans, young and adult, will be consigned to failure.

Our forebears, historically, even in the midst of the most heinous system of slavery that the world has known, nurtured and sustained an undaunted and unquenchable thirst for knowledge.

We must now, in a very difficult and taxing period in the history of our people, illumine and generate the historic passion for learning and human uplift.

It, too, must be understood that the kind of learning/knowledge that I am addressing is not education for subservience and docility. The very nature of education, if it is to have any merit or redemptive value, must be directed toward the liberation of the mind, intellectual autonomy or self-sufficiency and analytical abilities.

In a spirit of each one teaching one, we can begin now, in earnest, to abate and extirpate the scourge of functional illiteracy which weighs so heavily against us. I challenge you to seize knowledge now and become a whole, informed and productive member of the socio-economic and political order.

LETTERS

Voter registration a vital need

To those 56 percent of registered voters in Baltimore City who turned out to vote in the November 1988 General Election and to those persons and organizations that contributed to the mobilization of voters, gratitude is expressed.

For their efforts, they can be justifiably proud and satisfied for doing what was required of them.

But how can we account for this successively bottom-of-the-ladder turnout of voters in Baltimore City which has puzzled the governor, newspaper writers, and political party analysts?

The uncamouflaged truth is that the African-American community's political infra-structure lies impaired and the leadership there of did not timely take this election seriously and did not timely commit itself to extensive voter registration and mobilization of voters.

As early as December 1987, key persons of the MD NAACP, BUILD, the Baltimore City Ministerial Alliance, and the MD Legislative Black Caucus were warned that priority must be given to voter registration as an imminent tool for enhancing African-American political empowerment.

An analysis of monthly statewide voter registration data revealed little movement that indicated significant increases in African-American voter registration in Baltimore City, Prince George's County, and on the Eastern Shore. Again, in July 1988 this information was pipelined into the political leadership structure.

To restore the voting clout of Baltimore City in time for the 1990 elections, political reassessment, organizational building, and inter-community cooperation without delay must be commenced.

The bedrock of solid, effective political organization in Baltimore City must be the precinct and must be built around unpaid volunteers who are committed to developing political power in the service of their communities and of the people of Baltimore City.

When those volunteers are treated with respect and involved in the process rather than exploited as expendable pawns, and when that political power is seen as being translated into meeting the needs and concerns of communities in Baltimore City, then the problem of recruiting unpaid, volunteer workers to stimulate voter turnout will become secondary.

HERBERT H. LINDSEY

The media worsened the problem

Parren J. Mitchell
Former U.S. Rep.

In the City of Baltimore, accounts about violence in the public schools have dominated the news for the past several weeks. The first stories concerning a shooting in a public high school were treated in a sensational fashion.

Subsequent stories about similar incidents were handled in such a manner that a visitor to the City would be forced to believe that the public schools are cesspools in which rapes and shootings were daily occurrences.

That impression would be far, far removed from the truth because the city schools are, for the most part, free from violent behavior.

In this present situation, I am forced to blame the media for making the problem worse, rather than helping to solve the problem.

Anyone who knows anything about child psychology knows full well that one of the most important components in child behavior, especially teenage behavior, is imitation. If one youth wears a bright green Ralph Lauren windbreaker that captures the eye, hundreds of other youths will get a jacket just like it.

If one female wears her hair in a pony tail held in place by a large, ornate clasp, you will see that style imitated immediately.

I submit to you that the overkill by the media on the first incident triggered imitative behavior. Just as positive behavior is imitated, negative behavior is imitated by those drawn towards negative behavior. In one of the subsequent incidents, a gun was fired in the air outside the school.

Anyone who knows anything about child psychology, especially teen-age behavior, knows full well how easily a contagion of excitation can be created. I submit to you that the media, through its coverage, created a contagion of excitation which, when linked with imitative behavior, predictably created similar incidents in other schools.

Should the press report incidents of violence in public schools? Of course, it should! The question is not whether there should be coverage, but rather, what form should the coverage take?

Media coverage provides a service by alerting and keeping vigilant officials; parents and citizens concerned about the problem of weapons in schools. However, if the coverage is such that those officials; parents and citizens are driven into a "gun crisis-in-our-schools" mentality, then we have simply compounded the problem, worsened it.

It is ironic that while "violence in the schools" was the theme dominating the media, the National Rifle Association was implementing its 5 million dollar campaign to overturn Maryland's law against cheap, Saturday Night Specials.

For me, it would be far more effective if the sentencing of youth with guns in schools was given the maximum coverage.

I guess it is not even worth the effort to hope for maximum, almost daily, coverage of schools in which children are motivated, eager to learn, eager to excel. No, that is not newsworthy.

Kweisi Mfume
U.S. Congressman

Bush-Quayle Adminstration

The election of Vice President George Bush as President raises many issues which are of great im-importance to all Americans who are concerned with civil rights.

Even the most elementary survey will remind us that the record of the Reagan-Bush Administration concerning civil rights has been abysmal. It is safe to assume that his agenda will be to continue to challenge civil rights and affirmative action.

The assault on civil rights over the last eight years has been unprecedented. With the Administration leading the way, legislation has consistently been introduced to weaken hard fought victories.

The Civil Rights Restoration Act was under attack just last January. At a time when many believed that it should have been strengthened and broadened, opponents sought to narrow its scope and weaken its intent.

Fortunately, many of the amendments introduced to dilute it were defeated. However, when we sent it to the White House for the President's signature he vetoed it.

Although Congress mustered more than the two-thirds votes needed to override a Presidential veto, a clear signal has been sent from the White House.

Democratic Party attempts at economic justice (like raising the minimum wage) have consistently been thwarted by the Reagan-Bush Administration. The Administration's record of keeping the minimum wage at the same level since 1979 was never addressed by George Bush.

What defense could there be for this disregard for the working poor? As the Administration champions the cause of the wealthy through tax breaks, the majority of workers have their purchasing power eroded.

Additionally, all who favor a Supreme Court that interprets the law as opposed to rewriting the Constitution must consider the significance of the ideology that George Bush may bring to the Court during his Administration.

An indication of the battle before us can be found in Vice President George Bush's comments concerning the nomination last fall of Robert H. Bork to the Supreme Court.

Judge Bork failed to win confirmation because his public record showed him to possess an ideology and a judicial record which, in general, disregards the basic civil rights of the individual.

George Bush continued to defend Judge Bork throughout the Presidential campaign as an "outstanding" appointment.

At present, Justices Marshall, Brennan and Blackmun are in their eighties. These Justices have been most protective of civil rights, the right to equal protection, privacy, due process and the right to freedom of expression. Justice White is rumored also to be considering retirement.

If George Bush's support of Robert Bork, and his selection of conservative Senator Dan Quayle as running mate, is any indication of other nominations, we can expect that both Administration appointments and Judicial nominations will be prone to a destructive approach to civil rights.

While most of us would like to believe that this scenario would not occur, George Bush, has yet to signal otherwise.

Of equal importance is the voting record of Vice President-elect, Senator Quayle, who voted against each attempt to broaden the Civil Rights Restoration Act, as well as against the veto override and voted in favor of the nomination to the Supreme Court of Robert Bork.

George Bush will become the 41st President of the United States. It is the President's right to appoint his own Cabinet and to nominate men and women to vacancies on the Supreme Court as they arise. But his victory was not a mandate. In many states the margin of victory was less than 4 percent.

Last Fall, the nomination of Robert Bork was turned back because of the extensive outpouring of public sentiment against the judicial extremism personified by Bork.

It was the people's loud cry for strengthened civil rights that persuaded the Senate to defeat Bork's nomination. The people said that any dilution of civil liberties is unacceptable.

The next test of our national commitment to social justice will be to see if Congress is prepared to work for the broadening and strengthening of the civil rights of all Americans. The struggle continued and we know our adversary well.

Now is not the time to lapse into apathy nor to sink into resignation, but rather to gird ourselves for the work we must do. Jesse Jackson reminded us of the nature of his own candidacy for the Presidency saying, "I am a long-distance runner."

We also must be courageous and persevering long-distance runners for the road to freedom is long and the stakes are high.

COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

MEMBER MDDC NNPA UPI

Ruth Jenkins
SOB SISTER

Too much comes 'in the mail'

We must have some sort of special-delivery charm for the Pony Express of the U.S. Postal Service. The Philadelphia Department handles eight million pieces of "junk mail" daily . . . most of which lands at our mailslot.

Officially, it's called 'bulk mail,' but a rose by any other name smells as sweet. And creates just as much litter when it is discarded.

So we admit that our 'bulk' mail helped create that barge of Philadelphia trash now roaming the seven seas looking for a final resting place. And being rebuffed by one foreign country after another. As a tax-paying citizen, we could wish that the municipality would sponsor us on such a world-travel junket.

The tonnage of junk mail deposited at our doorway falls into the usual two classifications. One is the forthright kind which appeals openly for contributions to agency charities and causes.

The other is the more sophisticated subtle hype. From senders suggesting that they are blessing us with the privilege of sending them our money. You know, with come-ons like "Sweetheart sweepstakes . . . you may already have won . . . bonus bonanza . . . free trial invitation . . . sensational surprises . . . chance of a lifetime . . . you are one of our special friends . . ." So how come they address us as 'Dear Occupant?'

Then comes the sales pitch . . . for stuff you just can't live without: Such as — A baby spoon, with animal-shaped handle and pushbutton which plays looney tunes.

(For Mommie's sake, why don't toy makers promote a doll that is motionless, walkless, talkless, musicless, needless, listless, lifeless, humorless? A maddenly dull bore — something more like Daddy than like another baby?)

Also stuff such as — A giant outdoor thermometer, with "a nine-inch face and high-visibility numbers." The ad directs 'Hang it anywhere in your yard, and read the temperature from the comfort of your home, winter or summer.' Well, gee kid!

(If Mr. Eccentric in the comfort of his own home is that interested in the outside temperature, let him turn on his 45-inch TV set. So the 'highly visible' weather reporter can give him the same misinformation that the rest of us get).

And stuff such as — A bronze wedding-vow wall plaque, engraved with a couple's name, wedding date and traditional promises. Well gee whiz!

(Purpose, we guess, is to remind Adam daily about marital fidelity. To give Eve no reason to star on a talk show when the subject is 'He Done Her Wrong.' Or worse yet, when the subject is 'But She Done Him In.')

So mail order houses and specialty stores are swamping householders with junk mail. Meanwhile, cash-register bells begin ringing under Uncle Sam's tall hat.

So he jumps on the 'customer convenience' bandwagon. Makes a postal service grand gesture. Reinstates Saturday business hours which were suspended last December.

So now you can forget usual Saturday chores and enjoyments. Spend your off-from-work day at the post office. Buy stamps, mail packages, and challenge those confounded self-service machines. Oh yes, and check the gallery of 'most wanted' fugitives. To spot relatives and friends to cross off your holiday gift list.

Right beside this P.O. notification, the newspaper carried a surprisingly stupid crime story. Some clod got arrested for impersonating, not a police oficer, but a postal employee.

Imagine that! Must be a glutton for punishment. Cause legitimate mail handlers are complaining as much as breadwinners in other occupations.

Complain about irregular hours, insufficient pay, illegible handwriting, inaccurate zip codes, incomplete addresses, inoperable equipment, indistinguishable name plates, inaccessible mailboxes;

Also inadequate job benefits, ill-natured supervisors, ill-tempered co-workers, ineffective foot remedies, impatient householders, irritable receptionists, impenetrable traffic jams, and intolerable weather. Oh yes, and irate guard dogs.

Nevertheless, the phony postman went undetected for two years. Outfitted with (illegally obtained) uniform and badge, he made regular rounds, collecting mail in center-city office buildings. The ruse netted him over $100,000 in stolen and forged checks.

(So how come none of our creditors ever believed our 'check-is-in-the-mail excuse?')

Now facing a possible 115-year prison term, the impersonator really wasn't so smart. Probably tripped himself up trying to recite the letter-carrier's motto. You know, that bit about ". . . Neither snow, nor rain, nor precipitation . . ."

To discourage junk pile-ups
Here's an idea not to scoff
Barking-dog tapes in your mailbox
To scare the postman off.

Walter E. Williams
MINORITY VIEWPOINT

Go ahead, tell me I am wrong

Have you ever been confronted by a question and the only answer you can come up with made you suspicious? That happens to me a lot, and I wonder whether it's just me. Here are some examples.

South Africa has become a pariah nation for its denial of voting rights to its black citizens and its codified racial discrimination. Several hundred blacks died in confrontation with police between the 1960 Sharpville massacre and the 1976 Soweto riots. Since 1900, an estimated 7,000 South African blacks have been killed in civil conflict with the government.

Whenever human beings are mistreated, decent people have a duty to protest, and South African whites deserve such protestation. But hold on. Late this summer, the Tutsis tribesmen in Burundi went on another genocidal rampage and in the space of several days slaughtered an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 members of the Hutus tribe. The few Western observers, on hand, report atrocities ranging from decapitation and dismemberment to multiple bayonet wounds.

This is slaughter of major proportions, and I bet most Americans never even heard about it. But, you can bet the rent money that had South African whites beaten and arrested 10 blacks, on that same day the Tutsis were slaughtering thousands of Hutus, the lead story on the six o'clock news would have been the South African arrests.

There would have been political posturing, renewed calls for stronger U.S. sanctions, and liberal politicians would have gotten a good "sound bite" repeating their calls for South Africa to be declared a terrorist state.

The periodic Tutsi-Hutsu slaughters are just one example of black on black brutality. In fact, African blacks received far more humane treatment under their colonial masters than they have at the hands of their brethren.

Here's my question: Why does the anti-apartheid lobby become unglued when South African whites mistreat blacks yet show no interest when blacks commit heinous barbaric acts? The only answer I can offer is that they consider whites civilized and blacks uncivilized.

Therefore, even mildly barbaric behavior by whites is unacceptable while wholesale slaughter by blacks is acceptable — and expected. Please tell me this isn't the answer.

Now here's another perplexing question on an issue closer to home. Whenever someone proposes a voucher system or a tuition tax credit to provide parents with an opportunity to seek a better education for their children, politicians and teacher union officials say, "it will destroy public schools."

In the case of a tuition tax credit parents could deduct a portion of private school expenses from their taxes.

Politicians, teachers, and do-gooders say we can't give up the public schools; we must work to save them. Is their action consistent with their rhetoric? At least 19 percent of the public school teachers in some cities send their own kids to private schools; they must know something we don't know.

These people are making chumps out of black people. Where their children are concerned, they've given up on public schools, yet they're telling everyone else to have their kids' education endangered until the public schools can be improved. It seems these politicians will make chumps of black people forever. Tell me I'm wrong.

Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.
CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

Institutionalized racism

Racism can be defined as economically-empowered racial prejudice and discrimination. Although there have been some recent scholarly attempts to deny the persistence of racism as a major social problem confronting the social order in the United States, the evidence of blatant societal racism continues to be exposed.

Recently in the state of New York, a report issued by the state appointed Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth At Risk concluded that racism is an institutional reality in the public school system. The findings of this report have far-reaching implications for the entire nation.

The report revealed that New York has two unequal public school systems: one in the areas where the rich live and the other in the areas where the poor live. The Task Force concluded that racism was the underlying causative factor that created this inequality.

Students in the affluent and rich areas were predominately white and students from the poor areas were predominately African-American and Latino-American.

The Task Force stated that the first-tier or rich schools held "high expectations for their students but at the second-tier or poor schools low expectations and aspirations are communicated to these students, who are not given a full opportunity to succeed."

The report further found "our society's acceptance of two unequal educational systems is putting us at risk of creating a permanent underclass in New York and the nation."

Racial and ethnic communities across the nation in particular should become aware of this shocking report. It appears that there are deliberate decisions being made by school administrators to structure racial and ethnic students to failure.

The report explicitedly revealed "racism is expressed in a variety of ways: inadequate resources to those most in need; perpetuating segregated schools; and in some schools, the tracking of minority students into less rigorous academic programs without regard for individual abilities, interests and potential."

This institutionalization of racism must be challenged by all who believe in justice and equality. The last eight years of the Reagan Administration has set the stage for the gradual return to the days of Jim Crow.

While there has been progress toward eliminating some of the vestiges of overt racism, the pervasive nature of racism today demands vigilance, determination and constant social action to prevent a march back into history.

The future will be determined by the strength of our continued struggle for racial justice.

Developing black leadership

Manning Marable
ALONG THE COLOR LINE

The 1988 presidential campaign elevated two candidates who failed miserably to display any leadership capacity or ability to articulate the material and social interests of millions of working Americans.

Similarly, within black America, there exists a type of leadership crisis. To be sure, Jesse Jackson and the late Harold Washington exhibited a capacity to mobilize the masses with a progressive public policy agenda, and inspired thousands to care deeply about getting involved in politics.

But one cannot say the same for the bulk of the black elected officials, civil rights spokespersons and others who are projected in the media as token representatives of the black community.

More seriously, we are not approaching the problem of leadership as a challenge of development.

Leaders are not born, they are made; Martin Luther King did not become a leader solely due to his individual and innate abilities, but rather because of institutional and group factors which created the proper environment which could produce a person with such leadership qualities.

If we are truly serious about the challenge of building black political power in the 1990s, we must be equally serious about cultivating new leaders who have the capacity to initiate new organizations which advance our economic, political, cultural and social objectives.

As the results of the recent election make clear, blacks cannot look to the Democratic Party to show the way for our own interests.

What is a leader? A leader is basically an individual who has very strong views or opinions, who seeks to realize these views in modifying the behavior or activity of others within society. History shows repeatedly that leaders are not born, they are made by social conditions.

Leadership isn't absolute, but a relative quality. In other words, no person is, or is not, a leader. All of us have the capacity to develop our abilities to become leaders. Leadership is therefore a capacity, which can be learned, cultivated, and expanded upon.

From the perspective of Black history, there have been many leaders, women and men of talent and ability who displayed the capacity to motivate millions of our people to struggle for social justice, economic and political rights.

But if we study the careers of individuals such as W. E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Ida B. Wells, Malcolm X, and others, one finds a number of common traits.

Black leaders have usually been individuals who know the value of long term political relationships over one shot deals. Anyone can make a political agreement which gives one a temporary advantage over someone else.

You can also see this in the corporate world today, in which businesses foul the air and poison the waters with wastes, because in the short run, it is profitable to do so. But effective leadership means taking the long view.

The one shot approach creates superficial advantages for the minority, but can produce disaster for the majority. The long view implies a mature political perspective which takes into account the totality of society.

This may mean short-term sacrifices have to be made in order to achieve long term gains.

A real leader learns that you should never burn a bridge, because you might have to cross back over it one day.

One common characteristic of those who occupy influential positions within the black movement is a tendency toward pettiness, attacking one's opponents without presenting constructive and realistic alternatives.

Real leadership means an approach towards negotiations with one's opponents which transcends immediate concerns. This also implies the development of an agenda which advances one's group interests, which informs negotiations.

It's crucial to express disagreements yet to retain a degree of mutual respect and communications with all types of constituencies.

Successful black political leaders have always understood that you can't hit a target you never set. If you aim for objectives which do not challenge you, which are not difficult to obtain, then a person doesn't learn the capacity for leadership.

Setting ambitious targets and objectives which are practical yet visionary, which are set just beyond our current capacity, cultivates a determination and spirit for achievements.

Great black leaders realize that in solidarity there is strength. A leader is not powerful because he or she is articulate, or passionate in rhetoric. A leader's vital strength comes directly from close ties and extensive contacts within his or her constituency.

Leaders are powerful because of the active struggle for empowerment based within their group. Marcus Garvey, the great black nationalist of the early 1900s, was not a successful leader solely because he was articulate.

Garvey's leadership was based in the solidarity of black people within his organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. King's leadership was reinforced and magnified by the activism of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Black leaders who have achieved greatness comprehended that power is exercised by groups, not by individuals. To wield decisive influence, you must build a strong organization.

And finally black leaders understand that freedom is indivisible. You cannot be free by yourself, in isolation. Freedom is collective, not individual. No single black woman or man can be free unless all of us achieve political respect and economic equality.