EDITORIALS

John J. Oliver, Jr.
Chairman of the Board

Frances M. Draper
President

THE VOICE OF BLACK AMERICA SINCE 1892

Stop the homeless train

Homelessness does not develop overnight. Most of the people who are going to be the homeless next year are already on the "homeless train"— not saving even a penny a day, not getting all the education available, not using some form of birth control so they don't have more children then they can afford, and not thinking it was necessary to go that second mile to remain employed.

That's the majority.

But there are others- the battered wives, the disaster victims and the elderly,who become homeless due to circumstances beyond their control.

When combined, they make up a" fourth world" which is growing by leaps and bounds in the United States.Opening up more beds— when the weather turns cold and leaving the majority on the street at other times— is not getting to the basic problem.

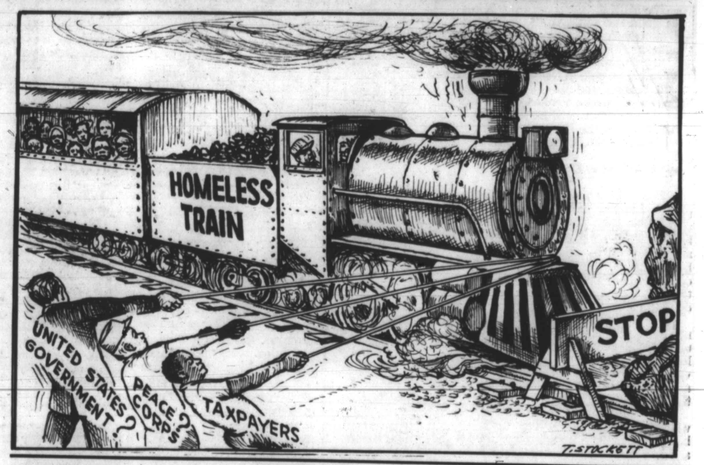
As the homeless gather in Atlanta, Jan. 14 and 15 in an effort to switch from the "symbolic to the pragmatic" they also need to take a hard look at reality.

Surveys have shown that most Americans want to help the homeless.And more important is the fact that taxpayers want their dollars to be used to find a solution- not a stop gap solution but a permanent solution.

We hear that down deep many homeless do not want to be homeless; that there are some homeless who like the street because they are "free"; that there are others who feel it is their right to be taken care of without any obligation on their part to help themselves.

The United States government has an obligation to help those who want to get off of the homeless train and to let those who don't want help go about their own business.

Shelters alone cannot stop the homeless train from riding on and on—only a well-thought out plan with the cooperation of the government, volunteers and the homeless themselves can bring the homeless train into the station for good.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Plantation tree

Carl H. Montgomery

"When would a Christmas tree stimulate the same racial indignation as an old Al Jolson routine? You give up? When it's the 'Plantation' Christmas Tree, decorated and sold at the Silk Greenhouse in Glen Burnie, Maryland.

I was shopping for Christmas decorations on the second floor of the Silk Greenhouse (an artificial plant store), when I discovered a Christmas tree garnished with various black faced dolls (of varied sizes and distinct dress), stems of budded cotton, along with plump green watermelons.

It did have however, flowers, baskets and straw hats, not to mention a dash of those tiny white Christmas lights to give it that holiday seasonal effect.

At first, it was just eye catching. I kept returning to the tree trying each time to be more objective and open minded, but the more I looked at it the more insulted I became. Having lost all desire to purchase any decorations, I put back the items I had chosen.

Finally, after conversing with another Afro-American couple, I asked a young Caucasian salesman, "Who decorates the trees and how are the themes chosen?" "That's the 'Plantation' Tree," he responded with enthusiasm. He further explained that the themes and the menus for the tree trimmings were supplied by the home office in Tampa, Florida.

I mentioned that I thought the particular theme was very stenotic. He replied, "Why? We've had all 'white' trees!" However, he had none to show me, at my request and could not remember what they consist of, nor the ethnic or cultural theme.

"Besides!" he said (replacing his enthusiasm with sarcasm), " . . .it's a part of our history and them days are over." I then replied (now in a rather affronting manner), "Yes, but the stench and the residue from 'them' days are as real today as it was then . . . and things like this (Plantation Tree), only serve to remind us that there are those who still long for 'them' days!"

Needless to say, I left the store with nothing but the address of the home office and an attitude unfit for the "season to be jolly."

Are we, as Afro-Americans, being overly sensitive, or in some cases not sensitive enough to the satirical mode in which our ethnic history is depicted? Should we voice our displeasure at what we feel are subtle forms of racism and bigotry? Or, are people (who get upset over things such as I have) simply trouble makers and those who make mountains out of molehills?

I don't think it's a matter of one's ethnic group. I can honestly say, I would have been just as offended had it been an ornamented tree depicting Jewish dolls from the Nazi death camp era (not to give the Silk Greenhouse any new ideas).

Nonetheless, in our modern contemporary society of freedom of speech and expression, who is it that gives others the license, literary or otherwise, to make light of an ethnic group's oppression?

Maybe you have the answers, maybe you don't. I think my letter is just a ventilating mechanism. I just wonder sometimes . . . when I hear of the upsurge of racial violence that's plaguing our major metropolitan cities, and feel the effects Reaganomics has had upon our nation's poor, or see things like the 'Plantation' tree, I just wonder if there isn't an attempt to force us back to 'them plantation' days.

I must admit, there is one positive thing that came out of this whole ordeal, I was forced to re-access what CHRIST-mas is all about. And, it's certainly not about decorations and trees.

Anthony Armstrong
Political Consultant

State of the state

Somebody ought to start a new program; this one with the sole objective of running bus tours throughout Maryland, exclusively for us who reside in the city.

The program would introduce urban-locked Baltimoreans to the rest of their state; with the nice by-product of helping us see another reality of the jewel on the Chesapeake Bay.

The closest thing I can think of to compare her to is a diamond, almost perfect; flawed only by a crack in its center.

Oh, yeah Baltimore has most of the state's poor people. We don't have the system of public education we ought to have either, at least not yet.

I know most of the "21st Century" corporations like to locate outside the Beltway; and too many of the citizens we'd like to have and need to have choose to live outside the concrete loop too.

Like everybody else, I bear, while I gird against, the crime, the drugs, the babies left to die in plastic bags, streets littered with broken glass, the armies of Styrofoam cartons, people sleeping in cardboard boxes over steam grates and doorways of closed tight buildings.

Yet, for every downside, Maryland has hundreds of shining bright sides. There's Worthington Valley, the Maryland hunt country, the pristine cuts of lawns in Columbia, the still calm ripples of the creeks and rivers that lace the whole state, and the excitement that rages just this side of the D.C. line.

Annapolis, that half rich half poor nugget, where the boats often shame the average house in price, the "God bless y'all real good" charm of southern Maryland, and the booming hustle bustle of the counties that surround this city are also Maryland.

Perhaps if more of us in Baltimore knew more about these things — I mean could touch them, smell them, wiggle our toes in them — perhaps, then, some of the wonder that is Maryland would "rub on" and stick.

We could stuff it in our pockets and place it on the computer tapes of our minds, for retrieval and use once we get back home to the city. "Maryland, as the state's new advertising pitch bellows, you are beautiful today."

It's because the state is so gifted with so many good things on, over, and under its flat land in the east, its gradually rising terrain in the middle, and its shushed heights in the west, that its fractured urban fissure shows in such glaring contrast.

We — Baltimore that is — were once the apex of it all; but that seems longer ago, now, than it really is.

Did Baltimore change that much, or was it the rest of Maryland that lost its pimples and gained the dynamics of an economic, social, and political catch for the winners of this world?

If we urbanites are to blame did we recognize what was happening to cause the eclipse of our former glow?

Is there something different about our water; does the air in town get up our noses, and lull the spirit — or did we simply forget? Did we know the sources of our strengths; and if we did, did we just assume that once the crown jewel, always the crown jewel?

So what if we didn't know. There's really no damnation in not knowing, only in not finding out. Notice that even a filthy Mcnasty neighborhood usually has at least one property that's always clean.

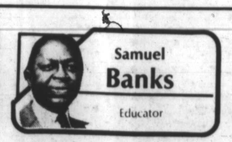
Similarly, in an environment of almost constant violence the violators know who not to mess with. That's because people have an innate sense of what to trample on, what to trifle with; and an equally developed sense of what not to destroy. They have to be reminded constantly, however.

Just talking about beauty and opportunity only angers people who see those things always belonging to someone else.

People have to see beauty and opportunity, have it, be it, if they're ever going to make it their own.

Moving Baltimore closer to the rest of Maryland in terms of promise for the future demands reminding, with ever increasing doses.

Why not a whimsical program, we have them for everything else? We could call it, The Merry Land that is Maryland. I'll even drive the bus; that way we can all see the state of the state.



Samuel Banks
Educator

Unconditional imperatives

As we plan and work to meet positively and successfully the societal problems, challenges, uncertainties, and opportunities of 1989, it is essential that we, as a collective black people, separate shadow from substance and the proverbial chaff from the wheat.

In view of the gravity of the times for us as black people, it is necessary for us, as a means of our sheer survival and continuance, to engage in less rhetoric and theatrical posturing and to develop workable and achievable short-term and long-term goals and objectives.

It is in this spirit, as we "launch into the deep" in 1989, that I offer ten critical emphases that we need to affirm as fundamental for group pride, solidarity and progress in 1989 and beyond.

1. Re-establishment of self-respect and pride. The historical record shows that no race or group of people can achieve enduring success and a sense of self-worth without a belief in the collective importance, value, and possibilities of all.

The invidious and ancient condition of self-hatred and doubt, once again, is reemerging among black people; especially among black youths and the economically dispossessed and alienated.

We must not only, as in the vibrant and turbulent Sixties, "say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud," as proclaimed by the inimitable James Brown, but we must loudly and demonstrately show through concrete actions our collective pride, love, and belief in our human potential.

2. We must insist on demonstrable educational excellence at all levels (i.e., grade school through university). Solid and high quality education remains the passport to success and fulfillment in the American social order. Demand the highest quality of leadership and instruction from those who teach our most precious investment—our children and youths.

We must dare to reward demonstrable performance and achievement and remove, in the name of accountability, educational lilliputians, sycophants, and toadies.

3. A concentrated and unrelenting effort must be made at all governmental levels, local, state, and federal, to abate and end the depression levels of underemployment and unemployment afflicting black youths and adults throughout our nation; especially in urban centers.

There will not be domestic tranquility when unemployment is at 40 and 50 percent levels among blacks in our major cities. We must work now for our own economic empowerment.

4. Dare to refuse to become a part of a veritable conspiracy of silence relative to egregious and escalating crime and deaths, principally drug related, which cause enormous pain, dislocation and trauma in our communities. To be sure, a persistent and historic institutional racism has created the ghettoization, enfeeblement and exclusion of most black Americans from the socio - economic mainstream, but we cannot simply spend all of our energies bemoaning this lamentable reality.

Within areas of opportunity available to us we must work with civic, religious, community groups, and sororities, fraternities, the Urban League and the NAACP to confront lawless and deviant behavior in our communities.

5. Dare through civic and community participation for full and high quality health care. Not only must we be concerned about the disproportionate levels of AIDS within our community, but also high morbidity or death rates flowing from respiratory and cardiovascular disease, cancer, and infant mortality.

6. Dare to insist on and work for decent, safe, and sanitary housing for all. Poor housing breeds discontent, disease, and social turmoil.

7. Dare to know your history—your historical roots. As we approach the 63rd anniversary of Black History Month in February, it is a marvelous time to know the remarkable history of our people through serious and sustained reading.

8. Register to vote, if you are not already registered, and participate in the political process. A voteless person is a powerless person.

9. Keep informed through reading and watching and listening to informative programs on the electronic media.

10. Speak out on issues of interest and concern to you through letters and calls to radio and television stations, letters to editors of newspaper and active involvement in church, civic and community organizations.

As a Watu Wazuri (i.e., Beautiful People), we can begin the beginning to achieve the ten unconditional imperatives I have outlined. All we need to, at a late hour in our history, is to muster the courage and the will.

COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

Walter E. Williams
MINORITY VIEWPOINT

Taxation and representation

We declared our independence on the rallying cry, "No taxation without representation!" While I buy that idea 100 percent, I was at a loss for words when England's Lord Harris of the High Cross once quipped to me, "Now that you have taxation with representation, how do you like it?"

The theory of no taxation without representation is so solidly a part of us that even people like Del. Walter Fauntroy, D-D.C., use the slogan when it serves their purposes, such as when he lobbies for statehood for the District of Columbia.

Since the idea of no taxation without representation has such broad appeal, do you think we could agree on what seems just as fair: No representation without taxation?

In other words, if justice demands that taxpayers have a say in the conduct of government, why shouldn't justice also require that people who expect to have a say in government pay taxes?

Imagine a small society of, say, 100 people. Fifty-one of them don't pay taxes; 49 do. If there is a majority-rule constitution, it's a safe bet that non-taxpayers will always vote for more government spending.

The reason is simple. Those who don't bear the burden of government spending will always vote for more of it. How fair is it for people who pay no taxes to have a say in matters where others pick up the tab?

President Reagan is proud of his "accomplishment" whereby he got Congress to remove people earning less than $12,000 a year from the tax rolls. Should we share his jubilation?

People who earn less than $12,000 per year benefit from national defense, better roads, education, and other government spending programs as do you and I. Why shouldn't they contribute?

Aside from the moral aspect there's an insidious political issue. Removed from the tax rolls, these people constitute a natural spending constituency for politicians. Knowing they won't bear the burden of tax hikes, they will always vote for bigspenders.

The same principle applies to Social Security recipients. Here's a group that has drawn out all they ever put into Social Security, plus interest, in the space of five years or so.

Their benefits have nothing to do with the actuarial soundness of the Social Security program; they derive solely from the government's imposition of more and more oppressive taxes on younger workers.

So here's your question for the day: Knowing that Social Security recipients don't pay Social Security taxes, which voting bloc is more likely to be entranced by and to vote for politicians calling for greater Social Security benefits backed by higher Social Security taxes—those over 65 years of age or mid-career young adults?

Now don't accuse me of bashing old folks; at nearly 53, to do so would stand somewhere near the height of indiscretion. Neither do I wish to suggest that the political franchise be based solely on income.

But clearly there are thorny problems involving justice when people who share no (or reduced) burden for spending programs have the same political rights as those who bear the burden.

Greater group conflict is precisely the result of greater government involvement in resource allocation. Limited government is the way out of this dilemma.

In other words, nobody should be allowed to use the ballot box to take my earnings, and I shouldn't be allowed to use the ballot box to get theirs.

Do you think my fellow Americans would buy this moral principle?

Les Payne

KRS-One raps for the homeless

The icy wind came snapping over the marchers in their thousands like ocean waves lapping over a dingy.

Homelessness in the nation was the issue that had drawn the protesters to the icy chill of the streets. The speakers, in time, spoke into the wind about those without a roof over their heads in New York, of course, and Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit and cities throughout the South.

Occasionally, the Reagan Administration was trotted out as an exhibit for slicing federal housing assistance from $26 billion to $9 billion.

Richie Havens, the troubadour, who has been doing these gigs since the '60s, gave a little speech, then sang, and scowled and quick-strummed his famed guitar. And there was Jesse Jackson, ever locking arms, looking anything but homeless, while speaking convincingly, as one who had seen days as lean as the one many in his audience faced as soon as the rally broke up.

Up near the head of the march was one Kris Parker, 22, a rap recording artist, with several hit albums to his credit. Parker, who records as KRS-One from Boogie Down Productions, worked the younger crowd with his posse for a cause that was close to his experience: homelessness.

He grew up a street urchin loose in the streets of Brooklyn and the Bronx. Rolling into his teens, Parker claimed what identity he had by spray-painting his graffiti name on walls and subways all over town. He was KRS-One, an acronym the self-tutored street poet derived from "Knowledge Reign Supreme Over Nearly Everyone."

The poet's brush is not much given to exactitude. However, in his short, not always happy life, Parker paints a picture where the gloomiest grays coexist peacefully with the brightest reds.

He was homeless himself, young Parker, leaving his mother's place at age 13 when he "got into the illegal part of life to survive." Some of the darker parts of his life, the questionable parts subject to dispute, already are beginning to take on a poet's luster.

Why did he leave home?

Parker says that he was determined to become a rap artist, that his mother was just as determined that he was going to get a traditional education and live a traditional life.

"My mother taught me that anyone who was a negative influence around you, you should get away from them," Parker said. "That's why I left home. She said that if you have a goal or a dream and someone tells you you can't do it, shake their hand and disappear. I followed her advice. It backfired on her in a way. I left home because she was the negative influence for what I wanted to do."

The independence he found on the dangerous streets of New York was paid for with his security and much more. KRS-One made his way in those early days as the marchers he supported last week continue to make their way through the dismal days.

"My life would go like this," he said in recalling his four homeless years on the streets. "I'd wake up at 3 in the morning. When I slept on the sidewalks a cop would come along about this time and slap you up side the head with his stick. If I stayed in Manhattan I would walk up to Central Park from like West 4th Street, about 60 blocks.

By the time I got there it would be 5 in the morning, the sun was coming up. So I would lay down for a little while till 9 o'clock, then go to the library. I'd go to the library because the library was warm.

"For food, I would make deals. I wouldn't see a dollar for months. You have no need for money. I didn't have to pay for anything. Sometimes, I'd mop floors. I'd tell a (restaurant owner): 'I will mop your whole place here, clean it up in less than an hour and you won't have to pay me money. Just feed me.' They would be a chump to that because they throw away so much food in a day.

"It wasn't always mopping restaurants or delicatessens, sometimes it was lifting boxes or whatever. I had three or four people I could always count on, but they were always changing. This was when I was 13, 14, and 15. It was a life of paradise for me because there was no pressure. No steady job. No mother telling you what to do."

Unlike most of the youngsters on the streets, the runaway Parker says he always saw himself running toward something.

While living in a men's shelter, Parker met deejay Scott (Scott La Rock) Sterling, who became his musical mentor. Murdered in a street encounter last year, Sterling is still cited as the moving force behind Parker's rap career. Parker, as KRS-One, sees himself helping to redirect rap music away from its Stereotype of violence-prone, ignorant street toughs.

In traveling throughout America and much of Europe, Japan and Scandinavia, Parker raps against AIDS, violence and drug dealing, but in the throbbing language of the street. It's not clear whether Parker can redirect rap, but it seems clear that he's a force in the music and an influence of causes such as the homeless.

"My inspiration was to become a rapper. I wrote down on paper my views of the perfect rap artist, what I wanted to be, real simple stuff. I created for myself this schedule, this year do this, next year do that. I'm about a year behind schedule."

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Parren J. Mitchell
Former U.S. Rep.

Chinese students — African students

Perhaps I don't socialize enough, and therefore, missed any discussion in the black community about the Chinese students attacking African students in the Peoples Republic of China. These attacks commenced on December 24th, and trouble persists.

African students from two Chinese universities were beaten; insulted; harassed and otherwise, mistreated by Chinese students and police. It is reported that the dominant chant was, "Go back to Africa." (How familiar that sounds.)

What caused this eruption? Did the fear and distrust of those who are strangers initiate the violence undertaken by the Chinese students? Did those students have an "innate antipathy and antagonism" towards blacks?

It is reported that the immediate cause for this violence was that the African students had dated Chinese women, had escorted them to social affairs. So, it is the old, hoary story again, the alleged fear of mixing of the races.

In Nazi Germany, there were no blacks in Germany. We were considered a subhuman species. During World War II, German soldiers were instructed to immediately kill Black Americans who were captured and not to try to hold the subhuman species as prisoners of war.

Also, during World War II, Black American soldiers in Italy were described as "bears" and the populate was told that we had tails. Many old vets from the war in Italy will tell you it was not uncommon to Italian children to ask to see their tails.

America aped Hitler with its slogans of "white purity;" "white supremacy" and "miscegenation never." In the South, formulas were developed to protect white race purity. These were designed to prevent any one with "black blood" from "mixing" with whites.

If you were fair of skin but had ¼ "black blood," you were a quadroon" and racial mixing was forbidden. If you had the external features of a white person but had 1/8 "Black Blood," you were an octoroon and mixing was verboten.

It is mind-boggling to believe that such ideas dominated a society. There is no such thing as racial purity, and there will never be. There is no such thing as "black blood." Nature did not provide any barriers against sexual intercourse between male and female human beings, black/white, Chinese/African; aborigine/Scandinavian.

But back to the Chinese students. They are university students who I assume have been taught or have read American history and absorbed the sordid chapters of black-white relations in the old deep South. As students, they are taught or read about contemporary race relations in America, the violent racial flare-ups that occur on a far too regular basis in America today.

It is somewhat strange that this would happen in China. On one of my visits to the African continent, I was struck by the visible presence of Chinese. The Chinese international policy entailed significant involvement in several African nations, with the intent to secure a permanent Chinese presence on the continent.

Yet, on the other hand, I am certain I read about the Chinese purchasing Black African males from the slave traders. Immediately upon purchase, these males were castrated and became eunuchs.

What is happening to the dream of third world unity and solidarity? Will mankind be forever cursed by such lies as "racial purity" and "no mixing" of the races?

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

Dangers to life expectancy

The National Center for Health Statistics in Washington, D.C. has just released a shocking report. For the first time in the twentieth century the life expectancy of African Americans in the United States has decreased in two successive years while the life expectancy for Anglo Americans has continued to increase.

I have received many letters during the last eight years questioning our criticism of Reagan administration social policies.

Now a report by a Federal agency confirms that there is, in fact, a serious decline in the overall state of health of the African American community. This phenomenon is directly related to the Reagan administration's budget cuts in social and health care programs.

Of course, African Americans have not been the only racial and ethnic group affected by these policies during the last eight years. Latino Americans, Native Americans and others also have been severely impacted.

Yet, the report from the National Center for Health Statistics verifies that the life expectancy of African Americans dropped from 69.7 years in 1984 to 69.5 in 1985 to 69.4 in 1986. During this same period, the life expectancy of whites increased from 75.3 to 75.4 years.

Now all of this may appear to most people to be only a slight difference in statistics. Yet, life expectancy is not just a random number; it tells you how long the average person can expect to live from birth.

Never before, at least in the last 100 years in the United States, has the life expectancy of one race declined for two successive years while the life expectancy of whites increased.

According to the **Washington Post**, "Some officials attributed part of the problem to economic policies of the Reagan administration, which they said have increased homelessness, cut aid and health care to the poor and otherwise hurt blacks disproportionately."

The infant mortality rate among African Americans is more than double that among white Americans.

During the last eight years there has been a disproportionate increase in the cancer rate of African Americans. Tuberculosis, drug-related deaths, AIDS, pneumonia and other infectious diseases have all increased disproportionately among African Americans.

Dr. Arthur H. Hoyte, former D.C. Commissioner of Public Health, stated, "It is really something that might be reflective of the policies (Reagan) instituted."

Ed Pitt, director of health for the National Urban League, said, "There's a crisis in health care for black America. There are a number of conditions that have gone unchecked in the black community that are causing an increase in the death rate."

Like racism, the genocide of a people can also be institutionalized. All Americans should be alarmed at this serious health crisis in the African American community.

President-elect George Bush must not continue his predecessor's devastating policies. All human beings deserve the right to live long and healthy lives. We must not allow racism and exploitation to deny this fundamental right to anyone.