EDITORIALS

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THE VOICE OF BLACK AMERICA SINCE 1892

Import of Duke win

The old adage "a leopard can't change its spots has held up as a truism for decades, and it is extremely doubtful it will change. Referring, of course, to emergence of a former wizard of the klan to the position of elected legislator.

That he won the runoff election in Metairy Parish, La. is not too surprising, since there are just 52 blacks in the 25,000 population of the parish.

The important significance of Duke's election is whether this is a true representation of the mood of the country, a fallout from the calculated retrenchment in social services and civil rights during the eight years of the Reagan administration.

Attempts to dismantle affirmative action efforts, upsurge in activities of radical racist groups such as the so-called skinheads, all point to an undercurrent pervading the country that seems to say that covert racism will merit simply a slap on the wrist.

The balance in the Supreme Court has been shifted sharply to the right, as promised by Reagan during his reign. Blacks, African Americans, colored, Negroes, or whatever we want to be called, should be alerted to this present danger of extreme racists infiltrating the decision and policymaking segments of our society.

The fact that a man with the proven racist views of a Duke can win election, should sound a warning note. While we bemoan the fate of black South Africans forced to suffer under an apartheid regime, nothing similar must be allowed to happen in this country.

The Republican Party has averred it wants to attract blacks into its fold, and now they are embarrassed by a member of their party getting into office who is a contradiction to that premise.

If the GOP wants to encourage blacks, as they say they do, then a positive move is called for—nay, is demanded.

Dukeland Nursing Home

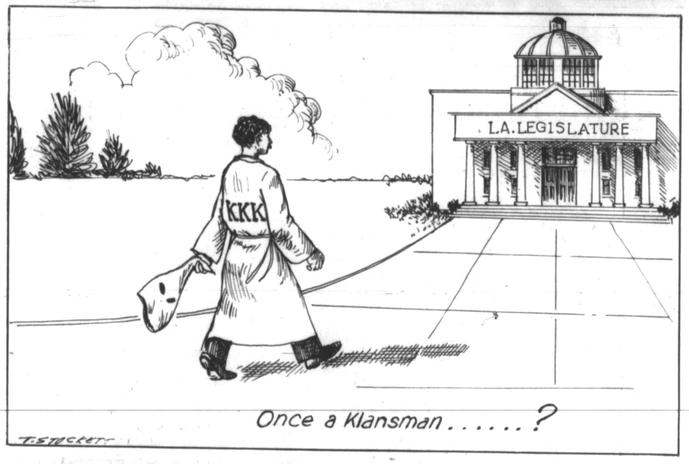
The report of the State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene on its investigation of the Dukeland Nursing Home reads like a horror story.

It is unbelievable that such conditions were allowed to exist, especially deterioration to the state described in the report. We can imagine the distress the families of those housed at the facility must feel at this point, and trust their fears will be swiftly addressed.

The disturbing factor is that such a deplorable state was allowed to exist. If there is no periodic inspections of facilities such as this—then there should be.

If the structure is in place calling for regular inspections—then someone or some agency has dropped the ball and needs to be called sharply to task.

The situation is intolerable, and must be dealt with immediately. The helpless aged must be protected and properly cared for. To do otherwise is criminal.



Anthony Armstrong
Political Consultant

Where to focus

David Duke ain't the problem, not really. Duke is more an embarrassment than anything else, and those who are most embarrassed are, as Duke himself as stated, "the people who feel as I do but only express such feelings in private."

Duke, ironically, is something like Malcolm X — the kind of person who reveals too much real information, and by doing so endangers his own life. So, let's not worry about the David Dukes of the world.

The things we should be worried about are half close to home, too close in too many cases; and half a world away in other cases.

In both cases the people we really need to be worried about are ourselves. About two years ago I wrote a political commentary for these pages that sought to compare African - American with Japanese.

I drew comparisons between our isolation and what of the Japanese; and I wrote about the similarities of two peoples, both unusually unique by virtue of appearance alone.

The point of that commentary was to outline some of the (success) methods used by the Japanese and how those methods contrasted with the (failure) methods used by too many of us.

Though both people share potentially disastrous fates, one has protected itself richly while the other, us, has seemingly been on a singular mission of self destruction.

The source of the differences did not then or now lie in anything but the way in which each people views itself. In short, in the different attitudes we and the Japanese have about ourselves.

The Japanese have not changed their very positive attitudes about themselves, and African-Americans, sadly have not modified our negative attitudes about ourselves.

The results have been striking, to say the least. The Japanese have become the world's bankers, in just 40 short years; and the African-American has become this nation's, well, doormat. Why?

What are the reasons that have made one group the world's master and another the world's slave; and why do we have to be the latter, especially given the broad similarities or our two peoples? One more time, let's go through it again. They are kings, we are paupers. Why?

If I said the Japanese were just naturally smarter, most of you would quickly shoot back, "Oh, no they're not." If I said the government (whichever government) gave every Japanese all the money they needed to get started you'd probably say, "Yeah, that's right."

You'd be wrong, however. If you said the world, especially this country, just happens to like the Japanese people more than they like African-Americans, than, I would suggest you measure the disapproval still be voiced, 40 years later, over Japanese actions during World War II.

Finally, if I said the Japanese live on an island with every conceivable natural resource, I'd be wrong-dead wrong.

I'm afraid none of the external excuses work. The answer for us, and the Japanese too, has not and does not rest on anything other than matters each group has the ability to control for themselves.

Where to focus? The answer is so simple: strong peoples focus first and positively on themselves—on their strengths. They nurture those strengths; they support those that uphold those strengths.

Conversely, they punish those among them that deplete their strengths. Where to focus? Isn't the answer clear? If not, David Duke ought to certainly make it clear. Don't focus on Davis Duke.

African-Americans need to focus on African-Americans.

Parren J. Mitchell
Former U.S. Rep.

They chose to starve

In South Africa, almost a thousand black South Africans are held in prisons. No charges have been placed against them. They have not been tried for any offense. They do not know how long they will be held in prison.

They are political prisoners. Three hundred of them have launched a hunger strike, which started about three weeks ago. They have vowed to fast to the death.

Some are ill and hospitalized. Would they die? Would they starve themselves to death? I fear the answer is "yes" unless. . .

Unless the clergy effort to end the fast during the negotiations with the government is successful; unless the court of world opinion forces South Africa to abandon its policy of arrest and indefinite detention without trial for black political prisoners.

I just learned that some of the prisoners have agreed to suspend their strike to see if the government will act in good faith and release them, but they may well have to resume their hunger strike.

For weeks, months, Americans, sickened by man's inhumanity to man in South Africa, protested before the South African Embassy in the nation's capital. Those efforts, and others, paid off when the Congress passed tougher sanctions against the Government of South Africa.

What can those of us involved in those protests, and others, do to help the starving hunger strikers? Before making recommendations, we need to assess the present tragic situation.

One encouraging sign was that the clergy have asked the prisoners to break their fast while they negotiate with government officials. If the prisoners resume their fast, what then are other possibilities?

I honestly believe that the government in South Africa is so vile, so depraved that it would try to force-feed the prisoners even though that process may cause serious medical problems. I truly do believe that the government is so wholly evil, it would kill these political prisoners and then fabricate a story that weapons were smuggled into the prisons and were used by the prisoners in mass suicides.

I am absolutely convinced that many in the government would be pleased to see the prisoners starve themselves to death, thus providing an abject lesson to show other blacks how hopeless their situation really is.

What can those of us here in America do to show our anger against that system and our sympathy and support for the political prisoners?

I am aware that TransAfrica, headed by Randall Robinson, has put its plans for a demonstration on hold in light of the most recent development. If it is necessary to resume in the future, I hope that each and every one of us will lend our cooperation. I certainly intend to do so.

I would like to see a 24-hour sympathy hunger strike in each of the districts of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus take place on the same day.

That would mean that cities in Mississippi; California; New York; Missouri; New Jersey; Georgia; Maryland; Tennessee; Texas; Illinois; Michigan and the District of Columbia could show their support.

In other areas not represented by Black Congresspersons, I would hope that church leaders and community leaders would organize a simultaneous effort.

Both recommendations would require an incredible amount of work to be done in an incredibly short period of time, but if we care, if we really care about our brothers and sisters in South Africa, we should, we must be prepared to make that kind of sacrifice.

Isn't it time to start planning for another massive demonstration in the nation's capital in April or May, a massive demonstration against the repugnant South African policy of arrest, indefinite detention without trial for Black political prisoners?

Events move swiftly in that savage nation of South Africa. Perhaps by the time this column is published, the hunger strike will be on again. If it is, there is still the crying need to protest against a policy which should not exist in any civilized society.

Will we act? Or, by failing to act, will we set the stage for another group of our brothers and sisters to vow to starve themselves to death in South African prisons?

Samuel Banks
Educator

Time to save black colleges

A bromide which has become universal is stated very simply, cogently and directly: "God helps those who help themselves."

This pithy statement has painful, unremitting and irrepressible pertinence for us as black Americans as we witness the tragic and lamentable plight of our predominantly black colleges and universities.

While it is decidedly true that black college and universities were founded and extended, overwhelmingly, as a reaction to the ignominious and studied exclusion of black Americans from white institutions of higher education by the majority white society, it now is demonstrably clear if the 114 predominantly black institutions of higher education are to survive and prosper in an era of high technology and cynbenetics, that we must do more ourselves to save them.

It is patently clear and incontrovertible from an historical perspective that black colleges and universities were ushered into being, largely in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when institutional racism was pandemic and hostile to opportunities in higher education for black students.

The leadership groups for all groups, black and white, come primarily from institutions of higher education. In this conjunction, the steady diminution or closing of black colleges and universities would be catastrophic for us as a people.

In spite of the burden and hardship of institutional racism and exclusion, we as black people must now, once again, begin to do more for ourselves in the sphere of higher education.

I recommend the following steps which should command our immediate and urgent attention:

1. Strongly encourage black students to attend colleges and universities. A college or university cannot survive if it does not, over time, have a steady and consistent flow of FTE's (i.e., Full Time Enrollees). State of the art facilities, distinguished and reputable faculties, support services for students and research and outreach activities are costly and necessary expenditures.

2. Support through monetary gifts and human services. We have to dig deeper into our pockets as loyal and caring alumni/alumnae of Black colleges and universities of higher education. Black churches, sororities, fraternities, entrepreneurs and civic and community groups, too, must be involved in the process of assisting our own colleges and universities.

I am reminded of two well-known and redoubtble aficionados of Morgan State University who render distinctive support to their Alma Mater.

The first of the two persons is Mrs. Virginia Briscoe Coleman who is a faithful and sedulous supporter of her beloved Morgan.

Mrs. Coleman, recently, was honored by Morgan State University in being named as "Alumna of the Year." Congratulations, Mrs. Coleman.

The second distinguished and highly respected alumnus is Dr. Herman Brown. In support of Morgan, Dr. Brown is very active in the Baltimore-Washington areas.

He is a revered professor of psychology at the University of the District of Columbia and is a prolific writer and speaker who is in great demand.

Notwithstanding the great demands made on his time by professional, church and community groups, Dr. Brown never forgets "Fair Morgan."

COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

Affirming set-asides

By William H. Gray, III

The Supreme Court's recent decision in the case *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.* has already been touted by some as a full-scale rejection of minority set aside programs. We must not let that happen.

Firstly, the Court has clearly affirmed the validity of federal set aside programs in the 1980 case, *Fullilove v. Klutznick*. That decision remains completely intact in the wake of *City of Richmond*.

Second, with respect to state and local set aside programs, which the *Richmond* case addressed, the Court did not rule the programs unconstitutional, but rather demanded that officials document the record of past discrimination in order to justify their remedies.

With this, the Court has added an exceptional burden of proof to the already crippling burden of past discrimination, but set asides still remain a legitimate tool of public policy.

Given the recent controversy surrounding the *Richmond* decision, it is worth affirming their functions and justifications to that *City of Richmond* does not become the tip of a growing wedge of opposition.

My concerns already have been heightened by the recent decision by the City of Wilmington to scrap its 1981 minority set-aside ordinance. That ordinance required Wilmington to hire minority-owned contractors for at least 15 percent of its public works projects. Wilmington is the first city to take such drastic measures, but it might not be the last.

Furthermore, I have uneasy feelings that Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's decision in the *Richmond* case will seriously dampen the enforcement of those set-aside laws that are left on the books.

A majority of the Supreme Court may not have accepted as evidence of discrimination the fact that only 0.67 percent of all construction contracts were awarded to minorities in a city that is 50 percent black. But such gross imbalance does not happen by accident.

The average net worth of all black households is $3,400. This disparity reflects the fact that American business and government refused to allow minorities to compete during most of the country's history. Affirmative action programs are a response to that record of discrimination and set asides are one formulation of the more general policy.

For roughly two decades, through set aside programs, the Federal government has tried to help minority businesses break into the economic mainstream by letting them first get on their feet in competition limited to other firms in their league.

If the only way to gain a foothold in federal contracting was to conquer giants such as General Electric, few small businesses—minority or otherwise—would never make it.

Minority set asides, which account for approximately 3 percent of government procurement, allow a restricted, but level, playing field on which to get a start.

The program's justification rests on the fact that a history of social and economic discrimination has put minorities at a disadvantage in raising capital, starting businesses and gaining competitive experience.

Simply removing old segregationist laws is not enough. The Reagan administration and others do not oppose minority set asides simply because they allow limited competition for government contracts.

If that were the case, those same people would be opposed to all of the circumstances under which the government limits competition.

People also do not oppose minority set asides because of the *way* they limit competition, i.e. by reserving some contracts only for competition by a limited group.

If that were the argument, there would be equal opposition to "small business set asides" under which any small business—white - owned or minority - owned—can compete for a pool of contracts that are off limits to major, Fortune 500 companies. But no one objects to small business set asides which, incidentally, typically benefit small, white-owned firms.

William H. Gray, III (D-PA) represents the 2nd Congressional District of Pennsylvania. He is Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus and author of a 10 percent minority set aside at the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Objection to minority business set asides comes not from opposition to limited competition, or even to the way competition is limited. It stems from the *reason* competition is limited—as a vehicle to advance economic parity.

Minority set asides are the most recent proposals to be put under the judicial microscope. Let's examine the case, not in terms of whether the Supreme Court was right or wrong in *Richmond*, but in terms of whether set asides, generally, withstand scrutiny.

The consequences of discrimination in this country have impeded (and continue to impede) minority entrepreneurship along at least two central avenues. It has severely limited the minority businessman's ability to borrow capital and it has significantly locked him out of the network of federal contracting in which incumbency is key and past relationships promote present success.

Restricted acccess to borrowed capital is unquestionably a severe handicap. Once a group has been handicapped in the competition for venture capital, it's not even easy to catch up once fair play is restored (which it hasn't been).

Minorities have thus been mired in catch-22 that demands substantial collateral in order to secure capital and capital in order to amass significant collateral. As a result, they tend to launch business in "low-threshold" industries that require limited financing. But precisely because these industries are low threshold, competition is considerable and failures are frequent.

While negotiating this treadmill, minority firms have also been substantially locked out of the federal procurement network. This claim is not a charge of some conspiracy theory, but simply a recognition that networks are fundamental to commerce.

Consider Defense Department contracting because it represents by far the largest single piece of federal purchasing. Also, the message behind the recent headlines on procurement fraud at the Department of Defense (DOD) tells us a lot about how federal procurement—indeed most procurement—works. Contrary to repeated official claims, the unmasked scandals reveal more than just an aberrant infection in an otherwise healthy operation.

Discrimination against minority entrepreneurs did not just harm the individuals who tried to build successful companies. It stunted the growth of wealth in minority communities. In 1987, the largest white-owned firm was still 100 times the size of the largest minority-owned enterprise.

Affirmative action has a solid, constitutionally - supported place in this country's history and in the present. The recent Supreme Court Ruling in *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson C.* does not shake that foundation.

It simply requires that states and localities be more clear in their specific justifications for one of affirmative action's several formulations; namely set asides, and that government be more precise in the particulars of the remedies that they devise. The place in our society for affirmative action is still set and set asides are still affirmed. They must be.

Walter E. Williams
Minority Viewpoint

Racial rudeness

To be a certified racist, you used to have to go buy a special outfit, burn crosses, and call names. Today it's easier.

Being a Republican, calling for balanced budgets, high education standards, and the death penalty can win you the awful appellation.

But something isn't working right when a person who harbors no racial hate gets labeled a racist simply because he takes what he believes are moral and responsible positions.

Coupled with this problem is a cherchez la femme issue. Whenever something unbecoming happens to a black, and a flesh-and-blood racist can't be found, the villain is institutional racism.

Institutional racism can be invoked to cover everything from blacks being held to the same standards as whites to blacks getting a flat tire.

Racism is a perfectly good word. It's an effective word; after all, who wants to be seen as a racist? But nowadays the charge is leveled so much that white people are quickly becoming immune.

Back in the '60s, when a salvo of charges of racism was fired, white people shivered ashamedly in their boots. Now they're beginning to laugh.

My modest proposal is to use racism sparingly. Save it for serious stuff. Instead of shouting racism at the drop of a hat, just substitute racial rudeness as the term of unbecoming white conduct.

Today's racial etiquette requires that whites not openly criticize blacks, ask embarrassing questions, or hold blacks and whites to the same conduct and performance standards.

For instance, following the Miami riots, Ted Koppel asked in a "Nightline" interview how was it that immigrants come here, take menial jobs, save money, become educated, and move up and out while blacks leave those jobs and education begging?

Koppel violated the new racial etiquette. In this age of racial enlightenment you just don't ask questions like that; but Koppel's not a racist. The best we can get him on is racial rudeness.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) recently called for a rule requiring athletes to score 700 on the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) and hold C averages to be eligible for scholarships and financial aid.

The NCAA was lambasted with charges of racism. John Thompson, Georgetown University coach, decreed that it was racist to treat unequals as equals.

The NCAA violated the basic foundation of the new racial etiquette by attempting to hold blacks and whites accountable to identical standards.

Racial politeness requires that universities maintain two standards: a high one for whites and a lower one for blacks. The NCAA cannot be indicted for racism; but we can get them on racial manners.

An essential premise of the new racial etiquette holds that people who have been victims of racism cannot themselves be racists.

That means when blacks assault and murder Asians, intimidate Asian merchants, put the torch to their stores, or seek out white people to molest, they cannot be racists.

In fact, the new racial etiquette decrees that whosoever calls a black a racist for such acts is himself a racist.

The new racial etiquette has been adopted in our highest centers of learning. Last year at Stanford University, some black students sported T-shirts emblazoned with "Black By Popular Demand."

Not a liberal brow frowned until some whites sported T-shirts emblazoned with their version of the truth, "White by the Grace of God."

Numerous campuses have black student unions and no sweat, at least until students at Temple University organized a White Student Union. In both cases, the white students forgot that racial politeness requires total rejection of what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

In that kinder and gentler America awaiting us, let's stop it with the ugly charges of racism or else we're going to make people immune to a perfectly good word.

Remember the little boy who cried wolf.

GUS HAWKINS

Last year I was proud to introduce legislation which gave Congressional recognition to the U.S. Army's 24th Infantry Regiment, a then black majority unit which began its distinguished service from the western frontier days until desegregation of the military during the Korean War.

Black History month gives us an opportunity to honor this and other valiant black combat groups who served this nation courageously, who, like the 24th Infantry, did not gain proper historical recognition.

The unsung achievements and valor of black American soldiers who served in World War I are examples of this historical neglect.

The heroic contributions of the Army's Black 92nd and 93rd Divisions are incredible when one considers that not only was "Jim Crow" racism prevalent in the United States, but it was also a system of institutionalized discrimination, which blacks endured in the military.

The 369th Infantry Regiment, part of the 93rd Division which became one of the most noted of the black fighting units, fought in France for 191 straight days and never lost a foot of ground.

Yet the fact that the 369th was constantly in combat was indicative of the racism of the times Florette Henri, author of "Bitter Victory," provides this insightful observation.

"One reason why the 369th was so continuously in the front lines was that there were no "rest areas" in the rear for black soldiers, as there were for white soldiers. Also, while white soldiers might spend their days of leave in French cities or towns, black soldiers were forbidden to. They were not always welcome even in the YMCA canteens, which provided hospitality for soldiers in their rest periods."

The French army, our allies in the war against Germany, admired and respected the heroism of American black soldiers. On many occasions the French wanted to decorate members of the 369th, only to be discouraged from doing so by the American Expedition Force.

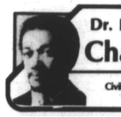
The black soldier in World War II

An exception was made when two black soldiers, Sgt. Henry Johnson and Private Needham Roberts displayed uncommon valor while defending an isolated outpost.

Bernard C. Nalty, author of "Strength for the Fight," writes:

"In May, 1918, when the unit was receiving its introduction to warfare on the Western front, a German raiding party in quest of prisoners attacked the observation post occupied by the two black soldiers. Although both Johnson and Roberts were wounded, they refused to surrender, fighting back with rifle fire, hand grenades, and even a bolo knife. These two men broke the barrier against decorations for members of the 93rd Division receiving the French Croix de Guerre. Other blacks would receive the Croix de Guerre and the American Distinguished Service Crosses, but a disproportionate share went to white officers."

Accounts of personal heroism such as this, and the collective efforts of black infantry regiments, enrich the treasure chest of Black history. It is history which goes beyond race, and reaches into the hearts of all Americans who care deeply about our cultural diversity.



Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.
Civil Rights Journal

African American

For the more than 30 million descendants of African slaves who are citizens of the United States, an interesting debate is now unfolding on how we choose to define ourselves.

Through the years we have been calling ourselves "colored," "Negro," "Afro-American," and "Black American" Since the days of slavery there have been attempts to unify descendants of Africa around a common nomenclature.

Yet the forces of racial oppression have always been opposed to any name that would exude dignity and self-respect to the people of African decent.

Now, in 1989, twenty years after the Black Power and black consciousness-raising era, there is a movement afloat to once again achieve a consensus on one terminology.

We encourage the use of the term African American as an appropriate self-affirmation and definition of the descendents of African slaves who are struggling to have citizenship with dignity in this nation.

We join with the comment of Mary Frances Berry, professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, that "this doesn't mean that everything will be wonderful and all the poor people will be taken care of."

It is our hope that this new consensus will translate to the vast majority of African Americans in the United States doing more collectively toward eliminating some of the real problems that confront our communities.

Finally, it is our belief that to call ourselves African Americans will send a message to our African sisters and brothers on the continent and throughout the Diaspora that we intend to be a part of the global community. placing a priority on our common African heritage.

AFRO welcomes letters

The AFRO welcomes letters from its readers. Letters should be brief and must bear the writer's name and address. All letters will be given consideration for publication. Write

Baltimore Afro-American
628 N. Eutaw Street
Baltimore, Md. 21201