EDITORIALS

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THE VOICE OF BLACK AMERICA SINCE 1892

Pierce's tragedy at HUD

The stench of fraud, abuse and political favoritism being unearthed within the realm of the Department of Housing and Urban Development answers certain questions some observers had asked over the past eight years, but the irony of the profiteering of insiders at the expense of the poor still shocks and angers anyone with a social consciousness.

Among the old questions that disturbed people before they learned of the true depth of the mismanagement at HUD were obvious ones like these: Why can't a brilliant lawyer like HUD Secretary Samuel R. Pierce, Jr. do a better job of counting homeless people? and Why was a wealthy, successful man like Pierce so proud of the fact that his budget was being cut at a time when federally subsidized housing for the poor was in such a sad state of affairs?

Apparently Pierce, dubbed by some as "Silent Sam" or the "Invisible Man," was Secretary in name but was as lackadaisical in his management style as was the president who brought him into his Cabinet, Ronald Reagan.

The very least that black Americans expected from Pierce is that he would have run an honest agency and stood up whenever possible on behalf of more budget to better support the public and other subsidized housing so dearly needed by low-income Americans of all racial groups.

Sadly, we cannot say he did that.

Worse, as his budget was slashed by millions of dollars, he joined in spouting that rubbish about doing more with less. Even worse than that, he seems to have sat quietly outside the door of power while appointed political underlings helped line the pockets of greedy influence peddlers and others who apparently just walked off with millions of dollars while HUD officials assisted or played the dumb game.

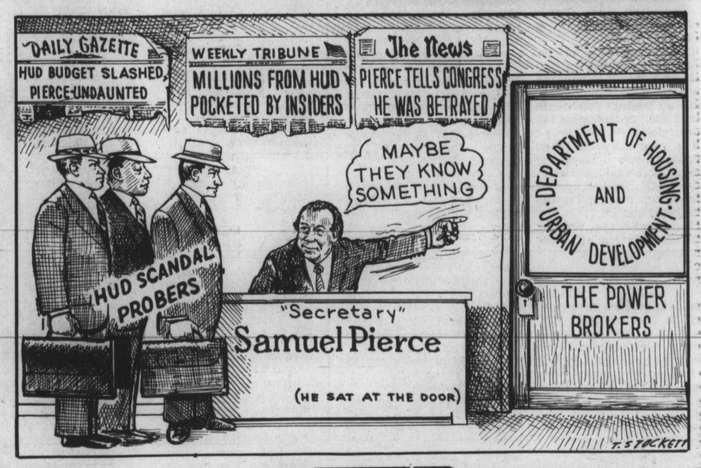
There can be no question but that lack of oversight, good management and political payoffs siphoned off money meant to ease the housing plight of people who depended on Pierce and HUD for fair and compassionate treatment.

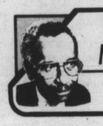
While there was plenty talk about helping families in public housing and in such programs as Section 8 housing, the action was in making off with as much as possible to politically connected people — many of whom knew very little about supplying housing for low-income families.

We hope that HUD Secretary Jack Kemp is going to clean up the mess, as he has promised. Kemp also might want to take a closer look at realistic economic and investment history to determine if the real-world laws suggest that low-income people are likely to be successful in running multi-million dollar projects developed with taxpayers' money.

It would be tragic for Kemp to clean up Pierce's mess while creating a pipe-dream tragedy to mar his own administration of HUD.

It's time the people who depend on HUD and the taxpayers who try to help them, get a long-overdue break from the agency and its officials.





Parren J. **Mitchell**
Former U.S. Rep.

Our future as democrats

Since 1932, black Americans have steadfastly supported the Democratic Party. We have bloc voted for Democratic representatives, senators and candidates for the Presidency. We supported the Democratic candidate in the last three presidential elections.

In the aftermath of the Jim Wright ordeal, the Democratic Party in Congress has elected new leaders. Thomas Foley is now speaker of the House; Richard Gephardt is now the Majority Leader; and William Gray is the Majority Whip. In addition, Ronald Brown now chairs the Democratic National Committee. All are fine, honorable and capable men, but will they be able to hold on the black constituency? I raise the question because, over the black constituency? I raise the question because, increasingly conservative, the Democratic Party has become increasingly conservative, almost reverting to conservatism of the 1940s and 50s.

Please remember that the Southerners in Congress were almost always conservatives and had captured the charimanships of most of the committees of the House of Representatives. From those vantage points, they were able to block civil rights legislation for years and to resist or weaken progressive social legislation.

In the 1960s , there began a dramatic change in the U.S. House of Represenatives. Young, progressive liberal candidates began to win elections and by the 1970's, they were able to bring about singificant reforms. Committee and subcommittee chairpersons could no longer be powerful dictators because they had to stand for election to their positions.

But gradually, the house of Representatives began to revert to conservatism, especially of fiscal issues. Much of the talk in Democratic circles on the national debt; the need to cut federal spending; and the need to adopt a more "moderate" posture. The cause of blacks, other minorities and the poor were moved to the periphery of the national concerns.

The anti-affirmative action policy of the Reagan Administration was overtly or covertly embraced by far too many Democrats, and the theme of "reverse discrimination" was accepted by them. They supported budget cuts that severely curtailed federal programs and glibly accepted the theories of supply-side economics.

The Democratic National Committee sought to distance the party from its black constituency in an attempt to fight the charge that it was the party of "special interests."

These new young conservative Democrats, who were once liberals, argue two major points. First, they say America has become more conservative and if they are to win and retain seats, they must shift with the tide. They also argue that, as the social and economic condition of the siginificant number of blacks has improved, we are becoming less liberal in our outlook and, therefore, less supportive of federal programs designed to assist minorities and the poor.

They do not remember that most federal programs came into beging out of the clear recognition that, in this nation, institutional, functional impediments are placed against minorities and the poor, thus preventing their full participation in the American society.

We believed that the Democratic party recognized this and would act to resolve those impediments. That is what held us in the party. If, however, the party no longer wants to govern in that fashion, then why should we remain loyal Democrats?

We face a real dilemma! We cannot, in good faith, join the Republican Party for as long as it remains dominated by the arch conservative wing.

Let us hope that the newly elected Democratic leadership will be able to return the party to those principles and practices which held us in the party. If they cannot accomplish this and if the Republican Party will not shift from dogmatic conservatism to a more moderate position, we will be forced to look at other political options. We will have no choice but to so do.

It's saved

Not once since learning that Juanita Jackson Mitchell might lose her Northwest Baltimore home as result of a $60,000 bank loan she was unable to pay, not once, did we believe that Baltimoreans would permit such an unthinkable thing to happen to this widowed, ill First Lady of the city's No. 1 civil rights family.

And they have not.

Baltimoreans from every walk of life, joined by others from around the country who know the history of the late Clarence Mitchell, Jr. and Mrs. Mitchell in the struggle for human rights, would not look away while someone who has made such a personal commitment on behalf of justice for all of us sustained such a blow.

Loss of the family home where many a great battle plan against Jim Crow was mapped, where rich and mighty and poor have been made to feel at home, and where the Mitchells raised their children — that was not to be.

When two of her sons, Clarence, III and Michael, found themselves in trouble, Mrs. Mitchell helped them fight their legal battles — as she and her husband had done on behalf of others over the years as nationally-known and respected NAACP officials. Many who now separate themselves from her jailed offspring, will always stand up for Mrs. Mitchell — because she always stood up for others.

The home will be preserved in a manner that guards against its ever being lost. It was an opportunity to again say thanks to one who has touched so many lives in a positive way.

Kweisi **Mfume**
U.S. Congressman

Baltimore at its best

This past week Baltimoreans showed that sense of civic pride and concern for the plight of others that exemplifies the best in humanity. Juanita Jackson-Mitchell needed help and many came forth with the necessary support enabling her to keep her house.

We should not be so naive as to believe that this kind of support just happens naturally; that by some critical mass of public sentiment the concern level in regular folks reaches a certain point and money starts appearing. The success of the effort was the result of three historical factors present in Baltimore's African American Community. As you and I are fully aware, we do indeed stand upon the shoulders of giants.

The first contributing factor is the concern that is part of the fabric of our community. We have been our own source of support for centuries and coming to the rescue of Juanita Jackson-Mitchell, the matriarch of black politics, is but one example among countless others that exemplify the spiritual foundation of our altruism.

The Mitchell home symbolizes for our community the struggle for the civil rights. Through the long days of segregation the modest home on Druid Hill fostered the organizations and programs that lead Baltimore's civil rights battles. Many of this city's movers and shakers had the seeds of their political careers planted in the rich soil of dreams and discussions within the confines of Mrs. Mitchell's home.

The second contributing factor is Mrs. Mitchell's long history of strong and effective community activism. There are very few of us who can say we were not touched in some way by the courage and determination of the Mitchell family. The forces that came together around Juanita Jackson-Mitchell are the progeny of the care and compassion that she and her family consistently shared. Frederick Douglass said that the only reward for partaking in any struggle is the opportunity to participate in the struggle. The people of Baltimore and the nation who contributed either their time, talent or treasure to this cause are the natural children of this philosophy.

The third contributing factor is our community's effective organization. There is more to getting the job done than believing that it should be done, there is also the realistic and practical consideration of knowing how it should be done.

Juanita Jackson-Mitchell gave us all so much through her life-long struggle for civil rights that it was only natural for us to show here what we have learned about community organization. The organization which sponsored the fundraising drive was an efficient and effective one — getting the word out and getting the funds in.

The success of this drive shines on all of us. It proves that the efforts of people like Juanita Jackson-Mitchell in preparing the way for us were effective indeed. When the need arose, individuals like the Rev. Marion Bascum, Delegate Elijah Cummings and Irvin Conway as well as many other people in Baltimore knew what to do, how to do it and why it should be done. I have always been proud of my hometown. And the events of the past week have made me even more proud.

For all that you are, for all that you have done and for the selfless altruism that you have displayed, I can only say, "thanks Juanita and thanks Baltimore."

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

LETTER

Liked article

Dear AFRO:

Thank you for the support that the AFRO-AMERICAN has given me. The full page article that appeared on May 6 was excellent and received praise from many of my supporters and friends. I also appreciated the photographer who was on hand to take pictures at my fundraiser and the mention you gave my fundraiser in your newspaper.

Your fine newspaper has my deepest gratitude for all the support you have given me, and I sincerely hope you will continue to do so in the future. Thanks again.

JOHN W. ANDERSON,
Sheriff, Baltimore City

The Afro-American
MEMBER The Audit Bureau
MDDC NNPA UPI

COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

Samuel **Banks**
Educator

Reform failure

There was a national sense of euphoria and high expectancy when former Secretary of Education Terrel Bell received the report of the National Commission on Educational Excellence in 1983 in the presence of former President Ronald Wilson Reagan. The report heralded, in contemporary times, an urgent and compelling need for long overdue reforms in the nation's public schools. It was highly significant and revelatory to observe that, even as the National Commission offered its findings and recommendations for educational improvements, President Reagan, while endorsing the focus and content of the report, refused to support the financial outlay necessary to implement the report.

It, too, is important to understand that the genesis of the report entitled, "A Nation At Risk," was essentially, declining Scholastic Aptitude Test and American College Test results for majority white children and youths. Little or no attention was given to the educational plight and unequal educational opportunities afforded black, Hispanic, and poor students. In point of fact, there have been over 20 major reports addressing educational reform since the much publicized "A Nation At Risk" in 1983. Again, except in a few exceptions, the issue of equal educational opportunity for black, Hispanic, and poor children was tertiary or mentioned in an incidental way.

The reality today is that over 10 black children, concentrated primarily in urban school districts, are in profound crisis and travail. While institutional racism, past and present, is the primary factor which accounts for the societal subordination and exclusion of most black Americans from the socio-economic mainstream of our nation and shoddy and unequal educational opportunities, there are also other important factors. The principal reasons for the lack of equal educational opportunities and demonstrable educational excellence, **other than institutional racism**, are as follows:

1. Marginal, unimaginative, and insecure educational leadership, in many instances where black superintendents and their subordinates head urban school systems. Leaders, political, corporate or educational, who suffer from an almost pathological insecurity are disinclined to support others of their groups who can effect positive and creative educational change and mobilize broad-based community support. What happens, unfortunately, to the detriment of children, youths and teachers is a tendency to appoint sycophants, toadies and pusillanimous persons to key and pivotal positions. The end result is ambiguity, discord, rampant demoralization and programmed failure for a disproportionate number of students.

2. An abysmal absence of human and monetary resources. School districts with majority black and hispanic school populations are expected to do **more with less.** In school districts which are touted nationally such as Brookline, Mass., Newton, Mass., Webster Grove, Mo., Montgomery County, Maryland, and Fairfax, Va., all highly affluent, the citizens are willing to pay for and demand educational excellence. The fundamental proposition which needs to be understood by all is simple: **Excellence in education is costly.**

3. Too few risk takers for educational excellence. I make reference to "risk takers" here as professionals in education who dare to be advocates for children and substantive changes as reflected in necessary textbooks, supplies, equipment, exciting and challenging curricular programs. In order to be effective as educational advocates, one must have a broad and capacious knowledge base, strong, lucid and incisive writing and speaking skills and intestinal fortitude.

4. Effective networking skills, capabilities in the larger community. The ability to effect productive and wholesome linkages or networks with other professionals and community groups is predicated basically on one's ability to demonstrate trust, openness and fairness. If fellow-educators believe or have a perception that their leaders are supportive of and demonstrate equity and fairness, the chance of mobilizing and achieving solidarity to obtain educational goals and objectives is enhanced immensely.

5. Urgent need to recruit more black and minority students for careers in education. Although black and minority students comprise over one-third of the 40 million students enrolled in the 15,000 school districts of our nation, their representation as school administrators, central office staff and teachers is abysmal. Black teachers, for example, represent only 8 percent of our nation's teaching force.

There remains much to be done to make certain tht the current educational reform movement reaches the masses of black, Hispanic and poor children and youths before we lose another generation of students.

The time for forthright, audacious, thoughtful and systematic action for demonstrable educational excellence in our nation's urban school districts is now at hand.

Ethel **Payne**
BEHIND THE SCENES

Saving home

BALTIMORE — On this pleasant afternoon in June when most of the city's residents were either enjoying themselves at the beach or down by the harbor, the neighbors in the 1300 block of Druid Hill Avenue were mounting a rally to save the home of Mrs. Juanita Jackson Mitchell from the auction block. With baskets and placards they took to the street to petition passing motorists and passersby to give for a noble cause.

The gathering was small, but the fervor of the campaign was large enough to attract civil rights loyalists from the Washington, D.C. area to hurry over to Baltimore to lend a hand and open up their pocketbooks. The Sunday papers carried the grim news. Unless the $60,000 loan that Mrs. Jackson borrowed 18 months ago to defend two of her sons now in prison is paid off immediately, the home on Druid Hill Avenue which has been home for her and her family for 47 years, the bank will seize the property for auction. With the interest and taxes, the total sum needed is $71,000.

The widow of the legendary Clarence Mitchell, Jr. who was for a quarter of a century the chief lobbyist for the NAACP has had two strokes and is suffering from other health complications. The mother of four sons, she has fought valiantly for Clarence Mitchell, III and Michael Mitchell, both former Maryland state senators who were convicted in 1988 on charges of fraud. The effort has taken its toll. She still maintains their innocence.

But more than their guilt or innocence, nothing has so aroused the sympathy of people all over the country as the prospect of a woman who shared her husband's devotion to civil rights being evicted from her home. The issue is now a cause celebre for those who recognize the enormous contributions made by the Mitchell clan to the passage of laws now on the books that have advanced opportunities for minorities in general. Ironically, while Juanita Jackson Mitchell has fallen on hard times, only a few blocks away, the federal courthouse was renamed for Clarence Mitchell, Jr. "the 101st U.S. Senator" who died in 1984.

In Washington, D.C., when Betty Polhaus, widow of J. Frank Polhaus, long-time associate of Clarence Mitchell, Jr., read the account, she dropped everything and took the trip to Baltimore, carrying with her a check from her five children who grew up in the era of the legislative battles on Capitol Hill. A small, quiet person, Betty Polhaus keeps alive the memory of her husband who as a white man, sacrificed a promising career in law to engage in the struggle for human dignity.

As an old civil rights battler myself, something in me responds when the fire bell rings. My friend, Dr. Louise White and I quickly drove over to Baltimore. When we finally found the 1300 block of Druid Hill Avenue, the sight of young children holding up placards and Baltimore police directing traffic to the Mitchell home brought a lump to my throat. With so much sleaze contaminating public confidence in our law-makers and politicians, it's refreshing to know that there is still a reservoir of good will and love for a neighbor in need.

For me, the Mitchells are special. Back in 1953 when I first came to Washington as a novice journalist, it was Clarence Mitchell (Pere) who taught me the wiles of Congress and guided me in asking questions of President Dwight D. Eisenhower which helped to focus the national spotlight on civil rights.

For those of you who are so moved, here's how you can become involved. Checks or money orders made out to the Clarence Mitchell, Jr. and Juanita Mitchell Trust Fund should be sent to the Harbor Bank, 21 West Fayette St., Baltimore, Md. 21201. Those of you who live in other cities can join in the campaign.

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

Judge Hastings: Justice on trial

Can an outspoken African American federal judge receive justice in the United States of America? Can the United States Senate provide a venue for a fair trial for Judge Alcee Hastings? Will the African American community as well as millions of others who believe in the pursuit of justice sit idly while another travesty and racial injustice occurs against Hastings?

These questions need honest answers. The truth is it will be very difficult for Judge Alcee Hastings to receive justice because of his race and because of his activism on behalf of the poor and downtrodden from his judicial bench. Ironically, the House of Representatives has accused Hastings of judicial impropriety arising out of the same circumstances that Hastings was found not guilty by a Florida jury.

On July 10, or shortly thereafter, the United States Senate has scheduled the Hastings trial. Interestingly, and in contradiction to established procedure, Hastings will not be tried before the full Senate but by a group of 12 senators who will ultimately make a recommendation to the full Senate concerning Hastings' impeachment. Although, Judge Hastings has not been found guilty of any crime or wrong-doing, the Congress of the United States is proceeding to prosecute and persecute Hastings.

Are there racial overtones in this case? Yes, we believe that racism and political vengeance are the major determining factors in these proceedings. Judge Hastings was the first African American to be a United States District Judge in the state of Florida. He alone prevented the Reagan Administration from deporting thousands of Haitian refugees and Judge Hastings, as a federal judge, openly criticized U.S. domestic and foreign policies. There is a vendetta against Judge Hastings.

The civil rights community and the church community cannot afford to remain silent. When the Hastings' trial begins in Washington, the Senate chambers should be filled beyond capacity and every effort should be made to communicate to the Senate that justice should be done in this matter. In fact, a fair trial for Judge Hastings would be no trial at all because he has already been tried once and found not guilty.

It is reported that the government has spent between $12-$15 million in attempts to impeach Judge Hastings. Although the government has provided no resources to Hastings to defend himself against these renewed allegations, Hastings is being pressured to abide by an almost impossible schedule of trial dates. Thus, Hastings is being forced to defend himself in the context of a tremendous financial inequity. The vast resources of the government are now being stacked against a judge who still believes in the cause of justice for everyone without racial discrimination. Yet, the economics of these proceedings also point to institutionalized racism.

Please write the following 12 United States senators and let them know your support for Judge Hastings: Senators Jeff Bingaman, Patrick Leahy, David Pryor, Richard Bryan, Jay Robert Kerrey, Joseph Lieberman, Arlen Specter, Dave Durenberger, Warren Rudman, Christopher S. Bond, Slade Gorton and Conrad Burns.

Judge Hastings is a fighter and even though the cards appear to be stacked against him, he has refused to surrender. The Hastings trial is a situation in which the judicial system itself will be on trial. Justice demands fairness and an end to the persecution of Alcee Hastings.

Les **Payne**
Educator

League wrongs

I never saw the Birmingham Black Barons play baseball, but I heard they were good.

To those of us who lived in Tuscaloosa, Birmingham was like Paris. When a family from our side of the tracks struck it rich, we were soon sure to hear that they had moved to Birmingham. Or that they shopped there for clothes. Or journeyed there for a big Baptist church convention with big-name preachers.

Buying clothes in Tuscaloosa was tricky. If you tried anything on, you bought it. White customers couldn't be subjected to merchandise that had touched black bodies.

Department store shopping was done mainly in the mind, not mirrors. A hat was the trickiest of all. A suit, a dress or a sweater couldn't be returned to the rack if a Negro had tried it on. We called ourselves Negroes back then; the white folks came close to calling us that.

Black shoppers had to show sales clerks honorable intentions and often back them up with cash before entering a store. We wore that indignity as easily as we wore overalls.

I assumed that things were different in Birmingham. Those who went there said they were. However, in her autobiographical account of growing up black in Birmingham, Angela Davis revealed that, as with everything else, shopping was just the way it was in Tuscalooosa.

This all played on my mind last week when I heard about the reunion in Atlanta of baseball players who played in the Negro Leagues. The three-day celebration, I guess, was baseball's way of righting the wrong it had done these worthy men. Incredibly, as always, baseball still didn't comprehend last week that the greatest wrong was committed against the major leagues — and, by extension, against America.

They didn't say it, but the old black athletes, in their retelling of their adventure, seemed to sense it deep, deep down within.

These men, who played in the 1930s and '40s, played the same national pastime as Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Lou Gehrig, Cy Young and all the other white immortals. And they played it just as well, sometimes even better.

True enough, they played with lousy equipment, on condemned fields, under rotten conditions. So unreliable was their transportation that most of their energy was spent getting from town to town.

I remember the Birmingham Black Barons.

Every now and then we would hear in Tuscaloosa about a hometown boy gone on the road with the team. Seldom were they heard from again. Their games were not broadcast nor their statistics printed in the local papers.

The Barons played baseball, real professional baseball — but not quite major league baseball. Back in those days, only white athletes could play major league baseball. We listened to games and read of their exploits in all the papers.

At a tender age, I saw the St. Louis Cardinals play a home game. We sat behind a pole in the Negro section and cheered like everyone else for Stan Musial, Enos Slaughter and Harry "The Hat" Walker.

I was told that baseball was a white man's game. It confused me, for I had heard about the Black Barons, and I wondered what exactly it was that they were playing.

Jackie Robinson, with his historical exploits and monumental suffering, began to make sense of the deception. He was black, yet he played a white man's game. But oh, what a price he paid.

Some of the athletes honored, or at least introduced, at the Atlanta ceremony made it to the major leagues behind Robinson. Don Newcombe was there; so were Hank Aaron and Ernie Banks. The real heroes, though, were those who never made it. Men like Ted (Double Duffy) Radcliffe, 86, who played for the New York Black Yankees.

"I'll tell you straight," Radcliffe told Newsday reporter Marilyn Milloy. "Sometimes we couldn't get baths for three or four days — we'd sleep in the bus because we couldn't get (hotel) rooms. One time we were on our way to Montgomery and we stopped in a grocery store and the manager said "Tell them n—ers to go around the back."

That's just what the major leagues — and America — told the players and all blacks: "Go around the back."

The lesson these players have to teach, their countrymen stand unready to learn. Instead of seeking forgiveness, America, in its arrogance, looked down on these old men in their new uniforms for their marked lack of bitterness.

In between the lines of their frivolity, the Negro leaguers spoke of that national pastime that is so truly American. It was a major league where only color mattered— not competence. Josh Gibson was the equal if not the superior of Babe Ruth, yet America never allowed him to play in the majors because he was born black.

True, baseball has attempted amends by including some of the old Negro Leaguers in the Cooperstown Hall of Fame. However, Arthur Ashe quite rightly suggested that it is the white major leaguers in the hall who should have asterisks by their names.

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