EDITORIALS

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THE VOICE OF BLACK AMERICA SINCE 1892

Jackson & the black press

Publishers like to host meetings in Washington, D.C. It is nothing unusual for a publisher to call in a caterer and invite certain members of the news media to sit down and talk with a power broker.

We are sure that Archbishop William Keeler of the Catholic Review might be inclined to do this with Cardinal James Hickey and other publishers of religious newspapers.

As Chuck Burger might be inclined to invite Thomas A. Dine of AIPAC to sit and chat with reporters and publishers of Jewish newspapers. And we cannot imagine other reporters who are not invited, to be clamoring on the outside of this catered affair to get in. Most would just set up their own press conference for another time.

But what happens when a black publisher like Calvin Rolark of the Washington Informer invites a group of black publishers and reporters to sit down with their power broker, the Rev. Jesse Jackson?

Not just a news story for the black press but people screaming about "excluding" the white press, a "secret meeting" and even a commentary to the white press by the president of the mostly black Capital Press Club voicing his displeasure. Why?

Can you believe that in the group invited to Rolark's luncheon meeting was a reporter who "slipped" a tape of the meeting to the white press; some who didn't think the meeting was normal and slammed civic leader Rolark for calling it; and reporters who couldn't get to their telephones fast enough to tell Mr. Charley "see what they did." (Shades of Milton Coleman who wrote about that so called "Hymie" remark)

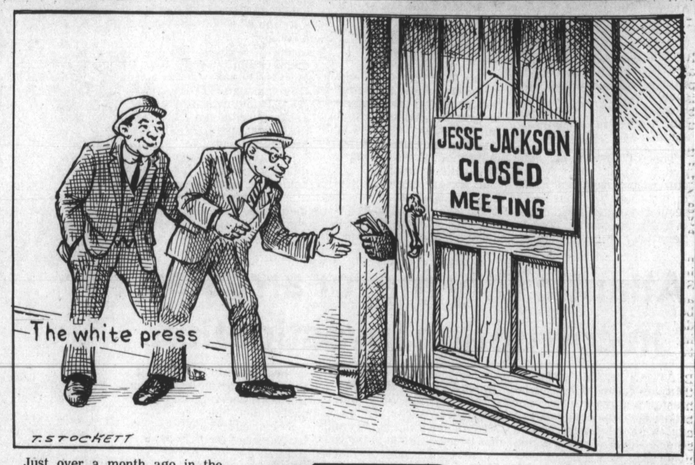
These are the same reporters- in some instances- who don't understand what is going on with the impeachment trial of Judge Alcee Hastings in the U.S.Senate; why the Mitchell brothers are in jail in Maryland and why black neighborhoods are being flooded with dope.

It's a given fact that some white folks spend half of their working days trying to divide and conquer the black race but they would not be able to penetrate our armor if we learned to stand together and fight back.

In the case of the black press/Jesse Jackson "closed meeting," those of us who have been following the Rev. Jackson and the political scene will gladly admit that the session was just a friendly chat about what we all knew anyway. Unfortunately, as it turned out, we also learned that there were some not too friendly faces in the group.

Thank goodness, the meeting this time really had no secrets to disclose — and thank goodness we now know whom not to trust if there are going to be any secrets.

We salute Calvin Rolark for calling the meeting (and paying for the luncheon) — But a word of caution, Calvin — Please don't invite those blabber mouths to the next session, for if you do you will let white folks chalk up one more point on their divide and conquer chart.



Kweisi
Mfume
U.S. Congressman

Lost opportunity

Just over a month ago in the House of Representatives I asked Members of Congress to comment on recent Supreme Court decisions reversing hard won civil rights.

I had but a few takers who spoke out deploring the steady and consistent erosion of affirmative action by the Reagan Court. A week prior, this column delineated how the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1964 have suffered serious and severe setbacks.

We are all too familiar with the deeply disturbing litany of cases that have fallen to defeat at the hands of this Court.

We can just about imagine what is in store for use sometime in the future of this Court bent on turning back the victories of our struggle: Runyon v. McCary and Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education may be the next victims.

The Court isn't finished with its activist agenda yet - not by a long shot.

Women, African-Americans with other minorities cry out for justice and equality but, for now, the case is closed for us judicially.

We now have to look to Congress for a legislative approach that will shore up the crumbling edifice of affirmative action shaken at its foundations by this new and strangely different Court.

Masses of American people need to be reawakened to realize the danger that is bred by this cruel display of judicial action. Unfortunately, it appears that many in this nation are more preoccupied with narrowing the scope of the First Amendment than broadening the scope of equality to include opportunity, and the protection of opportunity for all Americans.

It took two years for the 13 states to ratify 10 Amendments to the Constitution; these amendments are commonly called the Bill of Rights.

The First Amendment states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assembly, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Now, some people want to abridge the First Amendment by stating that our freedom of expression does not cover the burning of the American flag.

This act of protest is considered by the Supreme Court to be a protected form of speech, quoting Justice Brennan's majority opinion, "We do not consecrate the flag by punishing its desecration."

While I continue to remain unsympathetic to individuals who choose to burn the American flag as a form of free speech, I am even less sympathetic to those who burn crosses to limit the freedoms of others.

It seems to me that in our justifiable rush to condemn those who desecrate the flag we should be moving with even greater dispatch to bolster the weakened Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1964 by demanding that Congress sponsor and pass appropriate legislation.

America should show the Supreme Court that its priorities must lie in broadening the rights and expanding Constitutional protection to those citizens who have suffered the debilitating effects of sexism and racism.

Our national energies would be more appropriately expressed towards directing the Supreme Court, the Congress, the Administration and the States to put civil rights and affirmative action at the top of the American agenda.

G. James
Fleming
Public Affairs Commentator

NAACP battle plan: Action

The renewed civil rights battle plan of the NAACP, from here on, must be ACTION — in public education, organization, public relations, the courts; the legislation, coalition, money-raising and in planning.

The call is for action on the several fronts, with a vigor and dedication reminiscent of the times when NAACP field secretaries criss-crossed the country awakening the people, organizing them, raising funds—even the widow's mite—but also a time when branches of the organization were numerous and they represented real leadership in each community.

These were the days, too, when THE CRISIS was the brilliant membership magazine which was quoted by high and low everywhere and, most of all, these were the days when NAACP lawyers were changing law and making new law, all of the enhancement of the fuller civil rights of black Americans and other minorities.

* * *

Today's more sophisticated problems and approaches need an NAACP on the ready but, just as important, is the need to plan (sans oratory) for the schemes and legalizations of the future, which are sure to come from the continued Reaganization of the federal courts and other parts of the American society.

Planning looks around the corner before one gets there. Planning projects what will happen under differing circumstances next year or the next decade. Planning is being prepared.

It was more than a little surprising to learn (at the recent Detroit Conference) that officers of the NAACP had not expected or "thought" that the Supreme Court, as it is retooled by Reagan, would not, or might not, be handing down the kinds of decrees which have alarmed the civil rights community in recent months.

As far back as 1983, it was very clear that Reagan was fashioning a federal judiciary that was bound to make an impact—for ill—on the justice system, including the Supreme Court.

Even earlier, the conservative hold on all departments of the national government should have caused the NAACP to cloister several task forces where they could toss around ideas and draw up different scenarios and blueprints, to meet different moves of the enemy.

There would also be cloistered some cells dedicated to identifying and recruiting the interest of men and women to the NAACP's cause and program—men and women brillant of intellect and unyielding in their commitment.

* * *

The NAACP must also devise a plan; or plans, to "sell" the rightness of the cause of African-Americans to those other African-Americans who now wear white collars, carry attache' cases, and who have risen a peg or two up on the economic ladder.

Some of these mostly younger black Americans have forgotten, or have not learned, the lessons of history. They have not learned that democratic gains are less than skin deep and that, almost with the wink of an eye, the clocks that have been turned forward, can be turned back again.

History also teaches that those ethnic Americans who have made the most progress, and who exert the most political clout, are also those groups whose leading and successful citizens maintain their interest in their ethnic connections, support their organizations, and contribute to the general welfare.

The present-day Supreme Court opinions spell ACTION for the NAACP—a veritable call to arms.

Anthony
Armstrong
Political Consultant

Two 'Talented Tenths'

Former HUD Secretary, Samuel Pierce and our mayor have a great deal in common. As it turns out both men are part of what W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) called the "talented tenth".

On the surface, or should I say on paper, Pierce and Schmoke would appear to be extraordinarily capable men, both having achieved among the highest academic awards offered anywhere.

Pierce: Ivy League trained lawyer, Phi Beta Kappa, law partner in one of New York's many blue chip firms, corporate board member, darling of White America. The mayor: Harvard-Yale-Rhodes Scholar, lawyer, Lancer, loved by all.

So why have both men failed so miserably, one in a job he never wanted the other in a job he never should have taken? The simple answer could be that neither man was prepared to do, in the case of Pierce, what he was asked to do simply to give Ronald Reagan an African-American in the cabinet.

As for Schmoke he was goaded into running for mayor by a faction fully intend on wresting power from the Schaefer-led wing of the Maryland Democratic party.

After Steve Sachs failed so badly in the bid to accomplish the power changes at the state level, Schmoke was almost obliged, although he needed little encouragement, to take up the battle in Baltimore.

These two men, both obviously intelligent people, have proven it seems that intelligence alone is not enough. That a little lowly thing like common sense is still the bedrock of being successful.

Perhaps, however, being part of the ten percent, the cream of the crop, that is suppose to lead African-Americans means leaving ordinary things outside the door when you enter the training room.

It also means, oddly, that the training is conducted by someone other than African-Americans. What happened to Sam Pierce and Kurt Schmoke is nothing new; both men were cooped by a system designed to maintain itself.

A major principle of that system is to use us, to manage us, but, and this is the most significant thing to remember here, to manage us by using the directions of others.

White men used to have a phrase that summed it all up, although with different intent. The phrase goes, "once you go back you can't come back." For "silent" Sam and, I'm afraid, for "the chosen one" Kurt the opposite is proving all too true.

Yet, even DuBois himself later came to the conclusion that his own theory of a "talented tenth", saving African-Americans from themselves, would ultimately not work.

And it won't work because anytime a person allows himself to be twisted, turned, and used for another's purpose, that person will in the end mess everything around, for himself and for those he's been picked to oversee.

That seems to be the role of so many of that talented group among us who even their leader himself had to finally admit just didn't have it.

At this time in the sad saga of our young mayor it is not too outlandish a suggestion to suggest that he relieve Baltimore anymore trauma by resigning. Worse things could occur.

It takes a great deal of courage to stand up and admit that you were good at passing test of theory, but that you just don't have enough real test in practice to know what you are doing, in the job someone else decided you should have.

The list started with firehouses, went to drugs, continued with nepotistic and bad appointments, proceeded on to unwise contract awards. The schools are in a mess, the streets are dirtier than ever before, the jails, the funk at Back River, the city is being stolen blind by its own disgruntled employees, the police are boiling mad; and on top of all these things the mayor always conveniently seems to be out of the city while these problems mount.

The mayor doesn't seem to talk to anyone: the Governor, city employees, business people, or the voters. This ready list of negatives could go on and on, but what's the use?

And too, what's the use of Baltimore finding itself in a couple more years, in the same position as an East St. Louis, with its terrible "talented tenth" mayor who seems to be obvious to anything except his own pride?

Pierce got in trouble because he didn't have the commitment to anything but a misguided sense of loyalty. Schmoke is in trouble because, it appears, he didn't have a commitment to anything but his own ambitions.

Oh, the people's woes from two "talented tenths".

The Afro-American
MEMBER
The Audit Bureau
MDDC NNPA UPI

COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

Ethel
Payne
BEHIND THE SCENES

Miracle on H. Street

If you haven't heard from me lately it's because the summer blahs and personal problems have temporarily interfered. Now that there is light at the end of the tunnel, I'm back on track and running to keep up with fast-moving events.

It's not often that one woman gets the opportunity to salute another woman for an act of compassion that I'm calling "A Miracle on H Street." When Martin King, Jr. was gunned down in Memphis 21 years ago, cities across the nation erupted in black rage.

Writer James Baldwin's dire warning on The Fire Next Time ignited in Washington, D.C. On Seventh Street Northwest, 14th Street N.W. and H Street N.E. the flames became towering infernos. It was days before the fury subsided, leaving behind devastation and property loss in the millions.

Today, there is a District Office Building at 14th and U Street N.W., the Shaw Development Corporation has constructed new housing and business sites on Georgia Ave. N.W. and the Metro Green Line that will serve the black community is nearing completion.

H Street has come alive and there are thriving new black-owned stores and businesses blossoming in the area. Not many blocks away, Black Entertainment Television Network has moved into a vast modern day complex.

If you look back behind all the scandals swirling about the Office of the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the fact is that Marion Barry, Jr. deserves credit for much of the revitalization of Washington. But there is another who used the power of communication to rally community spirit.

WOL radio station AM and FM is at the corner of 4th and H St. N.E. A ground-level facility fronts on H Street which gives added exposure to passersby who stop to wave and kibbitz at air time.

Since WOL was acquired by Cathy Hughes and her ex-husband Dewey Hughes, the station has become the nexus for community activity and a listening audience that reaches beyond the limits of the District into suburban Maryland and Virginia.

WOL is listed as a soul station, but its enormous popularity is generated by the personality of its owner who rises at 4 a.m. to start a 12-hour day of music and chatty talk, followed by forays into the neighborhood to "get down" with the folks. She's Cathy to everyone and if there are problems to be solved she tackles them with the zest of 76 trombones!

At 40, she is lithe with luminous brown eyes, a mane of chestnut hair which she impatiently snaps into a pony tail at intervals while she keeps up a running flow of commentary on current affairs. Hughes is no stranger to controversy.

Two years ago, she led a protest against the powerful **Washington Post** when it inaugurated a new issue of its weekly Sunday magazine insert which carried what was widely perceived as a racially insensitive coverpeice.

So it was a recent Monday morning when this writer placed a call to her at the station.... "Cathy, we need a miracle. Juanita Jackson Mitchell will be evicted from her home in Baltimore next Friday when the bank will put the house on the auction block if the $60,000 loan is not paid off. Can you help?" ...Hughes.. "You don't have to say anymore. Be over here at 8 a.m. tomorrow morning so we can let the people know what's happening."

It took some extra money to get from Sixteenth Street N.W. to 4th and H St. N.E.; but make it I did. In a few moments, Lil Wiggins, a feisty lady in her own right, joined us. She writes a pungent weekly column for the **Washington Informer**. Despite the fact that a tree had toppled on her roof and there was no power in the area, she left a sick mother and an ailing husband to respond.

Most of the story has already been written. Mine is a twice-told tale with added vignettes of human kindness.

For more than three hours of precious air time, the three of us, Cathy, Ethel and Lil just rapped about the need for rescuing the home of Clarence Mitchell's widow, Juanita.

It was an easy sell since anyone who know the history of the civil rights movement, recognizes that it was Clarence Mitchell who crafted the legislative battles on Capitol Hill that led to the enactment of laws on civil rights which affected millions of Americans.

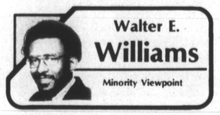
There was an instant miracle on H Street. It was as if milk and honey had poured forth from the heavenly land. People walked in from the street with cash and checks. A bus driver who had been told about it, stopped at the intersection with the approval of the passengers and ran in to make his donation.

"The Mitchells have done so much for all of us," said he. "We can't let this happen." The proprietor of a sea food place who was frying fish, wiped his hands on his apron and walked the short distance to the station to make a contribution.

The owner of a family fruit and vegetable market came with his daughter. "We want to do our part," they said. A retired government worker walked in with her check. "God has a plan. Trust Him. He will take care of Mrs. Mitchell."

Thursday afternoon, Jack Malloy, the WOL comptroller, gathered up the take thus far and we drove up to Baltimore to deposit $12,500 in the Harbor Bank for the Mitchell Trust Fund. the committee of Baltimore community leaders which had been working overtime met us at the bank to thank us.

The joint effort of the Baltimore-Washington axis had met the goal with more than enough to halt the auction. By Monday of the following week, there was another $5,000 to be added, making the total Washington contribution, $17,437.00.



Walter E.
Williams
Minority Viewpoint

Constitutional ignorance

Congress has been rocked by scandals; but, we have little understanding of, much less a desire to eliminate, the fundamental causes of the mess.

At the root of former House Speaker Jim Wright's scandal, among others, is a national contempt for constitutional principles and equality before the law.

A couple of months ago, I received an exchange of letters between a private citizen and Rep. Augustus Hawkins, D-Calif. Hawkins was asked to cite the constitutional authority for our foodstamp program.

He replied, "Just as the phrase 'provide for the common defense' authorizes Congress to appropriate funds for the military, the words 'promote the general welfare' authorizes Congress to expend funds for programs that provide people with food, shelter, and health care."

Such a flimsy interpretation applied to the Fifth Amendment's "pursuit of happiness" clause might easily be twisted to mean Congress should provide us with live music and drinks at our parties.

Hawkins' constitutional interpretation permits Congress and the courts to do anything they damn well please. It differs little from saying: If a person wants something that he cannot afford, Congress shall take someone else's earnings in order to provide it.

I don't want to single out foodstamps or Rep. Hawkins for special ridicule; it is just a concrete example of widespread ignorance and contempt for rule of law held by men we entrust with safeguarding our Constitution.

Back to political scandals. Why would people, legally or illegally, give money and favors to members of Congress in the first place? The answer is simple; they expect to get something in return.

So long as we permit our lawmakers to use their positions to give certain Americans and grant special privileges, no matter how much we strengthen ethics rules, we are going to have corruption of public officials.

The only change we can expect is greater efforts to avoid the appearance of wrongdoing and getting caught.

Charity is one of man's noblest virtues. With America doing about 85 percent of all world giving, we can rightfully be proud of ourselves.

"Public charity" is a sin which trashes both the concept and spirit of true charity. After all, charity is a voluntary act of conscience, but what Congress gives away is obtained through threats, intimidation, and coercion.

To my knowledge, only one congressman saw government largesse for what it is. Rep. David Crockett, Democrat from Tennessee who later died defending the Alamo, challenged Congress' wish to assist the widow of a distinguished naval officer.

Crockett said, "We have the right, as individuals, to give away as much of our own money as we please in charity... We have not the semblance of authority to appropriate it (taxpayer's money) as charity."

He realized that giving away taxpayers' money was closer to theft than charity.

Constitutionally, "...promote the General Welfare," means that government should do things which benefit all Americans, not specific Americans. Thus, promoting the general welfare might authorize federal programs like typhoid eradication, highway construction, and other public works.

I benefit and you benefit from these general services. But, I do not benefit from having my earnings taken and given to you, nor do you benefit from your earnings being doled out to me.

Do Americans have the courage and morality to minimize what Congress can give away? If we don't, let's not criticize the sale of favors by our congressmen.

At our peril, we forget Benjamin Franklin's warning, "When the people find they can vote themselves money, that will herald the end of the republic."

Ruth
Jenkins
Sob Sister

No rain on our parade

Killjoys tried hard to rain on our Independence Day parade.

For decades George Q. Citizen staged colorful festivities and fireworks on July 4, celebrating the birthdays of both the USA and jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong.

But lately we were struck by two shattering news reports. First, that July 4 isn't really Satchmo's birthdate. And secondly, that the Supreme Court okayed burning the USA flag as a 'free speech' protest permitted by the First Amendment. Well!

Seems that with no municipal record of his birthdate, Armstrong picked July 4, 1900 as a convenient one. But a jazz historian has uncovered a Baptismal certificate noting that Louie was christened at New Orleans' Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ on Aug. 25, 1901, a later year three weeks after his Aug. 4 birth.

Church officials said they were long aware of this certificate. But assumed it referred to another person since the dates were so different. However, the parents' names on this record match, and it gees with 1910 census data.

The famous musician died in 1971. But if the Baptismal evidence is correct, he was a year younger than he believed. Not surprising. That jazzy sprout could hardly have been rooted in turn-of-the-century chamber music.

As to Old Glory—The Supreme Court stance inflamed strong reaction. Particularly in Philadelphia which had spawned both the Constitution (1787) and the flag. (Betsy Ross).

(Actually, the First Amendment is part of the Bill of Rights adopted in 1789 when Congress met in New York. Also, historians have found no verification of the Betsy Ross flag-making legend. But let's not quibble about the technicalities.)

And Besty says not to worry. If the flag goes up in smoke, we can wave some patriotic wigs: Red, from Tina Turner; white, from Dolly Parton; and blue, from Phyllis Diller.

Well, burning issues usually make sparks fly. Ever since Nero fiddled while Rome burned.

So neighbors blow their stack when we burn backyard trash. Husbands raise the roof when wives burn the toast. Palimony lawyers howl in pain when a mistress burns love letters.

Mama plays hard rock when Daddy burns his fingers. Women libbers resign en masse when we burn our bra. Daddy blows a fuse when Daughter burns no lights on parlor date.

But once in a while there's an exception to the rule. The burning of the Atlanta certainly sparked Scarlett O'Hara. Into a fiery self-reliance and into a flaming don't-give-a-damn romance.

So her spirited sisters of today all carry cigarette lighters...though they no longer smoke.

The Constitution or the flag,
Which one should you fly,
When your TV picture fades, with
Plea to 'Please STAND BY'?

Parren J.
Mitchell
Former U.S. Rep.

Crime and Punishment

I deliberately waited a while before writing about the sentencing of Oliver North. I did so because I wanted to be as objective as possible in passing judgement on the sentence handed down by Judge Gessell. My initial reaction was, here is another slap on the wrist.

The Congress of the United States passed a law which specifically prohibited the sale and/or shipment of arms to the Contras. Oliver North, operating in a complex, clandestine scheme, defied the will of the Congress and the law of the land.

Federal funds are authorized and appropriated for specific purposes. Oliver North diverted funds from their designated purposes to send arms to the Contras. Once again, acting in defiance of the law.

When he became aware that he might be prosecuted for his actions, he shredded government documents in an attempt to cover his tracks.

He raised the "Nuremberg Defense" at his trial. The Nazi war criminals who had followed Adolph Hitler's orders to commit almost unspeakable atrocites against non-Aryans argued at their trials in Nuremberg, Germany, "We were just good soldiers, following orders, obeying the commands of our supervisors, why should we be punished?"

For his crimes, Oliver North was given a three-year suspended sentence, placed on probation for two years, and ordered to do 1,200 hours of community service. He was also fined $150,000.

The question is, "Was that sentence fair, was it commensurate with the crimes he committed?"

Many years ago when I served as a probation officer, a white man was sentenced to 15 years in prison for the armed robbery of a liquor store. An American Indian, traveling with him did not participate in the robbery but was given a quart of whiskey. He was sentenced to five years in prison. The sentencing judge told him, "by your company, you are known."

In sentencing North, the judge agreed that North was following orders from his superiors. But if North knew that his superiors were blatantly breaking the law (which he did), then "by his company, he was known," and therefore, did he not deserve a more severe penalty?

Crimes against persons and/or property (breaking and entering, assault, rape) generally carry stiff sentences. Often, "white collar crimes" (embezzlement, fraud) carry less stiff sentences.

Were the crimes committed by Oliver North "white collar" crimes? In a sense, they were, but if one thinks about the impact of his crime on the safety and security of the nation, they must be considered as deadly serious crimes. His actions, along with those of his accomplices, tore at the very fabric of the political order of America.

He said Congress could not be trusted, that's why he did what he did. To undermine or attempt to undermine belief in a representative system of government could have far-reaching effects on the system of governance.

North and his cohorts in crime set up a small group of men as a government within a government. That kind of action plants the seeds of fascism, and that is an enormously potential danger.

The Poindexter - McFarlane - North group operated an "off-the-shelf" intelligence network in which civilians, non-governmental persons performed covert acts in exchange for government contracts. "Off-the-shelf" covert operations are inimical in the best interests of a democracy.

Weighing all these facts, and others, the sentence did not fit the crime in the North case.

I am glad I waited a while before writing about the North sentence because my first reaction was to compare the light sentence given North to the harsh, heavy sentences given to black offenders for their crimes. To have done so would have been a mistake because, for the most part, it would have been a comparison of political crimes with crimes against persons and property.

However, I cannot help but think what if, what if North had been a black man? Would he be considered a super patriot as North is considered by many people? Would there have been a public clamoring for a Presidential pardon as some are now demanding for North?

Finally, does not the light sentence leave the door open for future defiance of the law? For more "off-the-shelf" covert operations? For more diversion of funds?