EDITORIALS

John J. Oliver, Jr., Chairman of the Board
Frances M. Draper, President

Labor Day

Labor Day is observed annually as a tribute to workers in the United States and Canada. Public Law 90-363 sets Labor Day on the first Monday in September. In 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed into law an act designating the observance.

It is impossible to mention labor without adding labor unions. In the struggle for civil rights for Black Americans, the unions have been in the forefront, arm in arm with civil rights organizations.

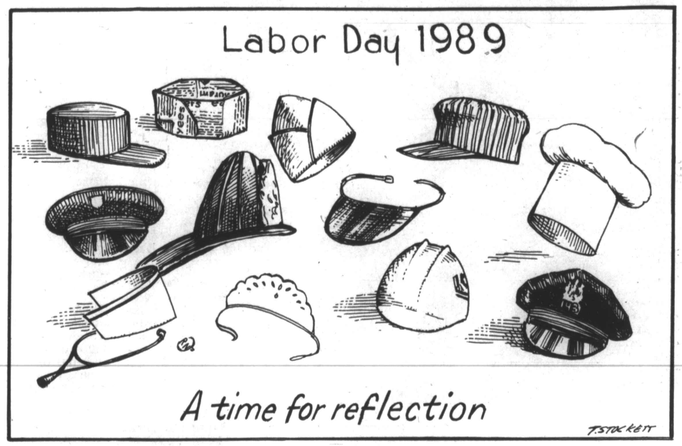
The 1963 March on Washington was supported with money and manpower from the unions, and indeed the machinations to get the march on the drawing board were spearheaded by a union leader, A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

The heads of two of the largest unions in the country, the AFL-CIO and UAW were in the front row of marchers as the 1963 demonstration strode through the streets of Washington.

While Labor Day has come to be viewed as a respite from the daily grind, its intent and purpose is to give the laboring forces their "day in the sun." In years past, a Labor Day parade was a major part of the day's celebration. This practice has diminished somewhat in later years.

Now it has become a day marking the close of the summer season, the final fling before schools reopen, another chance to barbecue in the park or the backyard—with laughter and gaiety the primary focus.

Through this, there should be a moment of reflection, of recognition of the contributions of labor to the country and the world. After all, this is a day for the working man and woman. Without them, the world would be bare.



Kweisi Mfume
U.S. Congressman

Minority Business

The specter of *Richmond v. Croson* has reared its ugly head locally as the Maryland Highway Contractors Association (MHCA) filed suit August 22 in U.S. District Court asking the court to declare unconstitutional the 11 year old Maryland Minority Business Enterprise Law.

The Supreme Court began eroding the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 in January of this year when it struck down a 1983 Richmond, Va. program that provided some measure of equity and protection for minority owned construction businesses.

Ever since January we have been waiting for the other shoe to drop. This challenge to Affirmative Action programs was all but inevitable.

MHCA's litigation is a blatantly opportunistic attempt to recreate the uneven playing field of the pre-civil rights era.

MHCA Executive Director, Robert E. Lantham, says that the purpose of the, "lawsuit is to ensure that all contractors, irrespective of race or sex, have a fair chance to compete for business on their merits."

This obvious smoke screen flies in the face of reality where white men already own most of the eligible construction companies and are awarded most of the contracts offered.

Mr. Lantham says the 10 percent set-aside is unfair. This is ridiculous.

Rather than Affirmative Action Lantham's alternative proposal of "outreach, training and other positive, non-racially based methods" is patronizing and anachronistic. MHCA's real motives are apparent behind their empty rhetoric. Their suit is really about recovering the 10 percent set-aside as well as the 90 percent it already has access to.

I agree with the Attorney General's office in believing that the present law is sound and will survive the challenge, however, to win the battle, the necessity for the law needs to be copiously documented.

Governor Schaefer and many State Delegates are committed to gathering the pertinent data. Baltimore's Solicitor's office will issue a report soon of a study commissioned to assess the need to revise the city's Minority Business Enterprise laws.

All of these interested parties, along with the Maryland Congressional Delegation, must now formulate a strategy to close the loopholes and propose appropriate legislation for Maryland in the light of MHCA using *Richmond v. Croson* as a ploy to strengthen its near monopoly of State awarded contracts.

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

Kansas City racism

There is an old axiom that the way of the midwest sheds light for the rest of the United States. Kansas City, Missouri is a thriving city and is often referred to as a barometer of how well the pluralism of this society is working.

It is therefore, noteworthy on a national level when there is a substantive allegation of systematic racial discrimination in Kansas City.

A lawsuit has now been filed in the Federal District Court in Kansas City that alleges institutionalized racism and racial exclusion in the city's school desegregation plan. A particular focus on controversy is the denial of access of African American school children to the city's academically enriched magnet schools.

There are approximately 35,000 students in the city's schools and seventy-five percent of them are African American or Hispanic.

Attorney Steven R. Miller who represents the parents who have filed the suit stated, "These black students can't get into magnet schools this year.

"For children, a year is a long time in their educational life that puts a kind of urgency to it."

Back in 1984, Federal Judge Russell G. Clark found that the State of Missouri and Kansas City had illegally segregated the local schools.

Judge Clark ordered a desegregation plan that called for improvements in the quality of education for all students and for capital improvements of schools that had historically served African American neighborhoods.

Although, the magnet schools have many vacancies and low student-to-teacher ratios, African American student applicants to these magnet schools have been assigned to non-magnet schools while their names have remained on waiting lists for many months.

Ms. Threquinta Thompson who is a plaintiff in the suit said she believes the issue is both challenging racism and seeking quality education.

Ms. Thompson is referring to her daughter, who is in high school, stated, "I'm trying to get her into a school that will better educate her for her life as an adult."

Kansas City's magnet schools are being transformed into specialized schools that stress mathematics, computer development and foreign languages.

Judge Clark had ordered that each magnet school have an enrollment of at least sixty percent racial and ethnic and forty percent white.

Yet, today many of these magnet schools are increasing their enrollments of whites while excluding African American students.

This situation only shows that the struggle for justice and fairness is a constant struggle. Although many battles for racial justice have been won in the past, even in cities like Kansas City, we must never rest on our laurels or assume that the struggle is complete.

We still have a long way to go toward equal justice and full equality in this society.

But to be sure, no committed person in this land should stand for the racist treatment of children crying out for equal and quality education.

We must sound the trumpets again: "Kansas City, here we come."

G. James Fleming
Public Affairs Commentator

Mickey Leland

In Texas schools, playgrounds and scholarships will be named in his honor, following the flags at half mast, the memorial services, the official extensions of sympathy, and the lavish-in-praise editorials. And more.

All that for Mickey Leland, the Texas and African-American member of the U.S. Congress, who lost his life in reaching out beyond race, nationality and family to feed the hungry and starving, wherever they might be.

From "sharp-tongued spokesman for the civil rights and anti-war movements" in the 1950s and 1960s (to quote one commentator), he had grown into "an activist for all humanity," to use his own words.

And he did not let his fellow-congressmen forget the needs of the homeless and the underfed at home and abroad.

The State of Texas also was aware of him. In fact Texas gave him his start, as he was to show himself ready for the changing Texas. Helped by the civil rights decisions and laws, the state had lowered its racial bars and African-Americans now could compete freely for political office.

Mickey Leland, trained as a pharmacist in Houston, ran for the Texas House of Representatives, served five years but, became a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives when the pioneering and brilliant Barbara Jordan retired from the body. He was elected in 1978.

Texas was changing. Texas had changed from the days when African-Americans were discouraged, if not legally prevented, even from voting. It had changed, too, from the time when Blacks were not admitted to the state universities, except those "for the colored." It had changed from the Texas where public accommodations were "public" only for Whites.

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There has been an about-face in Texas, indeed. The public schools are desegregated, of course. That's that law. But, in the private sector there is also evidence of the change. The corporate world is no longer lily-white; African-Americans now can be seen, not only in the lowest-level jobs, but on all levels of skill and training.

Minorities — Blacks and others — now represent a respectable sprinkling in the white-collar positions, in business, commerce and the public service.

Travelling in Texas is now free of the hassles that Blacks, especially, had to endure in the days of jim-crow and trains, and in the era when most of the hotels and motels were "for whites only."

Thanks to the heavens, too, water fountains, labelled according to race, have long since disappeared.

Texas may not be heaven, anymore than New York, Massachusetts, Illinois or California is heaven but, like the rest of the South, it has changed mightily — and for the better.

• • • •

Mickey Leland had a hand in bringing about this change, just as he benefitted from the change. And, he helped to make Texas what it is today, just as Barbara Jordan has, both in and out of politics, in and out of Congress.

George Thomas Leland (the real name of the Congressman who was found dead on a mountain side in Ethiopia on August 13, 1989), by his manner, by his ability to win friends and influence people, by his bulldog tenacity when fighting for the righteous causes, and by his dedication to the uplift of the poorest in the world, has set an example for all of Texas; indeed, he has added an element of quality to all that Texas has and can become.

The many-sided story of Mickey Leland is also the story of Texas and the history of Texas, from now on, must include the story of Mickey Leland.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Educators failure

Dr. Samuel Banks' column, "Reform Failure," was on target as regards education for African-Americans in urban school systems.

An additional reason to be added to Dr. Banks' excellent list of failure reasons is African-American educators' failure "to identify with" the population they serve. This identity crisis results in too many African-American educators "blaming the victims."

It is creative, imaginative, risk-taking educators who see the students they serve as extensions of themselves. They are confident that our children and youth "can, will and must" achieve, because they are capable individuals! Individuals whose African heritage is replete with examples of excellence.

But their failure to consistently advocate for (Advocacy includes appointment of capable people to positions of authority. It is not limited to asking for more dollars for salaries and programs) and instruct our children and youth with love, a significant number of African American educators believe the "big lie," that African American children and youth are inferior to White youth.

Marvin Gaye said it most eloquently: "Who really cares? Oh what a shame, such a bad way to live; All who is to blame, we can't stop livin'; Live, live for life, But let everybody live life for the children; Oh, for the children; You see, let's save all the children."

Gwendolyn J. Cooke, Ph.D.

The Afro-American
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COMMENTARY & OPINIONS

Les Payne
Educator

Blacks entitled to more respect

In order to guarantee that his daughter would go through life with a title of respect, comedian Dick Gregory named her "Miss."

I've never heard why he named three of his other nine children "Ayanna," "Yohance" and "Christian." But Gregory has always done things his own private way.

As lightly as we may take Miss Gregory, her comedic father's pre-emptive strike against bigotry is bottomed on a legacy of disrespect that African-Americans often see as their lot in this republic. In the Old South, for instance, only whites were called "Miss" or "Mister."

Under those apartheid conditions much significance was crammed into such social titles, Gregory, at least, counterattacked.

In the broader society, the media tend to create and popularize high-sounding titles of royalty for achievers. Unfortunately, they bestow them almost exclusively on white achievers. This pattern is pushed to the limits most noticeable in those industries where blacks compete most successfully for pre-eminence.

Take music, for example.

Paul Whiteman, whose big bands popularized dance music for white audiences in the late 1920s, the media crowned the "King of Jazz." Similarly, Benny Goodman was anointed the King of Swing. Since there can be only one king, other innovators, some of them superior, were subordinated to the crowned ones.

This pattern holds in American music. Innovative black artists create a new sound, share it with others — in no time some white musician is elevated as the latest royal exponent of this or that genre.

Dave Brubeck said recently that he was frankly embarrassed that he, and not Duke Ellington, first made the cover of Time magazine as the spokesman for jazz. The courtly Ellington was too gentle to tell Brubeck that the media, in those days, would have insisted on a white star or none at all.

Under such conditions Elvis Presley was enthroned as the King of Rock and Roll.

Usually when African-American celebrities wear such rank, their buddies — or, as in Miss Gregory's case, their parents — lay it on them. The rank of Earl, which jazz piano great "Fatha" Hines wore, was bestowed upon him at birth.

Duke Ellington got his rank, not from adoring media, but from a member of the band. So too with Count Basie and other black stars. The royalty attaching to today's black stars tends to be garnered in the same manner. Too impatient, or too smart to wait for the media, rock musician Prince crowned himself.

Even Eddie Murphy, the mildest Negro this side of Arsenio Hall, seems sensitive to this racial manipulation by the media. While heaping high praise on his idol Presley, Murphy, in a recent interview in **Rolling Stone** magazine, allowed himself to wonder about the downplaying of black artists' achievements.

"I'm aware of racism," Murphy said, "although I don't feel overt racism toward me. What Hollywood doesn't do, however, is acknowledge your accomplishments as readily if you're Black. For instance, Michael Jackson is never given enough credit for being the, biggest thing in the world.

"Taking nothing away from Bruce Springsteen—I like him—but I attribute a lot of his popularity to the fact that there has to be a white counterpart. Michael is the Thriller, but Bruce is the Boss.

"If you think about it, we get all — up nicknames. Bruce is Boss; Sinatra is the Chairman of the Board, Elvis is King; John Wayne is the Duke, Jackie Gleason is the Great One. Michael is the Gloved One. The Thriller! Fred Astaire; the Greatest Dancer Who Ever Lived; Bill Robinson could outdance anybody who ever existed right off the planet, and they called him Mr. Bojangles."

I hear the sharp ones clucking, "Well, at least they called him Mister." But Murphy's point is one well-aimed and deeply felt. Faced with a racist environment, blacks' quest for their due respect sometimes, as with Gregory, takes on bizzare twists.

In sports, as in music, white achievements are invariably ranked over those of blacks, often without regard to evidence or statistics. Thus Babe Ruth, despite Hank Aaron's record, remains in the minds of many the greatest home run hitter ever. The malady takes on pathetic proportions in cases like the hero worship of the likes of basketball player Larry Bird.

In such American madness, it's small wonder that Muhammad Ali ran around all those years shouting that he was "the greatest of all times." But I submit that boxer Marvin Hagler might have stepped a bit too far in getting his first name legally changed to "Marvelous."

Dick Gregory's naming of his daughter seems not to have gone unheeded by African-Americans bent on getting due respect.

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Walter E. Williams
Minority Viewpoint

Guilty or not guilty

To say Congress kills is a serious charge, but let me lay out some parameters and you make the decision — Guilty or not guilty?

Africa's drought and Soviet-style farm collectivation account for a large part of the continent's starvation. It also stems from U.S. policy on the export of effective pesticides.

Locusts start out as relatively harmless grasshoppers. When conditions are right they emerge in staggering numbers, up to 150-million locusts per square kilometer, where they can eat 100 tons of food per day. That's enough food to feed 500 people per year.

According to Dr. Thomas R. DeGregori and Diana F. Solovey in an article, "Out of Africa," in the Summer 1989 issue of Priorities, a publication weapon against locusts are DDT-type compounds such as Dieldrin.

But elite environmentalists have pressed Congress to ban the export of Dieldrin in the name of protecting the earth and human life. They want poor Africans to buy Malathion and Carbaryl which are much less effective against pests and 10 times as expensive.

It's true that DDT-type insecticides are more toxic than their more modern and costly substitutes. It's also true that we used DDT in the United States when we couldn't do better, but the environmentalists would deny the same access to others that can't do better.

This is a familiar tune among do-gooders; now that we're on the boat, let's pull the gangplank.

Our Congress provides equal opportunity in the sense that its policy kills Americans as well. Rachel Flick, in an article, "Why Can't We Get the Medicine We Need?" in the current **Reader's Digest**, writes about callous Food and Drug Administration (FDA) policy.

In 1980, Knoll Pharmaceuticals introduced propafenone, an effective treatment for a potentially fatal heart disease, FDA didn't approve the drug until 1988. We can only guess at the number of people who needlessly died as a result.

Dr. George Frederick had prostate cancer and needed flutamide which had been widely used in Europe for years and found effective and safe.

However, flutamide had not been approved in the United States. To get flutamide, Dr. Frederick managed to get FDA's permission to "research" the drug and now his prostate cancer is in remission.

About 500,000 Americans died of heart attacks each year, According to Flick, 75 percent of these attacks are caused by blood clots.

The drug TPA was found effective in dissolving clots in clinical tests in 1985, but the FDA didn't get around to approving it until late in 1987; and only then because of loud protests from the medical community.

One wonders how many Americans die as a result of this branch of government.

Last month, I wrote how the Department of Transportation regulations send thousands of Americans to their death through their mandate for Detroit to produce higher mileage cars.

Cars that get more mileage are made lighter and less crashworthy. According to several studies, 4,000 Americans will needlessly lose their lives and another 20,000 will be injured annually as a result of DOT requirements for the 1989 models.

I asked Transportation Secretary Skinner about this and his answer showed a callous disregard for life in favor of a concern for the environment and the wishes of Congress.

Congress and the bureaucrats are only too willing to take these risks with our lives because the victims are invisible.

Those who die because of starvation, the unavailability of useful drugs, and less crashworthy cars are not likely to know why they die and their relatives would never think of their deaths as resulting from an act of Congress.

Congress — Guilty or not guilty?

Samuel Banks
Educator

Labor Day: time for action

In a few days, Labor Day will have come and gone, signaling anew that the joys, euphoria, frustrations and opportunities of the summer hiatus will, unofficially, draw to a close.

Now attention must be focused on meeting the multifarious, complex, and urgent socioeconomic problems and challenges of the Fall and beyond which remain encrusted in the American body politic.

This situation, to be sure, represents a time when most Americans can take pride in knowing that over 110 million Americans are gainfully employed, a Gross National Product of over $2 million dollars, and our nation even in the midst of global crises, is the most powerful and prosperous nation in the world.

All Americans, Black and white, can take immense pride in the cornucopia or abundance which is the United States.

There will be ringing, sonorous and grandiloquent rhetoric highlighting the richness, diversity, inventiveness, and prosperity of our nation on Labor Day.

We have, as a collective people, every right to rejoice and give thanks to God for enabling our nation to be plentiful in natural resources, human resources, and economic capital.

However, as we celebrate Labor Day 1989, we, too, must remember the "Other America" immortalized by the late Michael Harrington over 20 years ago.

The "Other America" is populated primarily by Black Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and poor whites.

A supreme challenge on Labor Day 1989 is to make a national resolve and to implement concrete action-steps to make sure that the poor, dispossessed and excluded are brought within the framework of a prosperous and inclusive America.

We have, as a nation, the human and monetary resources to accomplish this long overdue, just, and humane reality. What is sorely needed, at a very late juncture in our national life, is the will.

Black citizens, in particular, as a result of 204 years of official slavery and subjugation and institutional racism, remain, to a substantial degree, the victims of institutional exclusion and non-participation in the socio-economic mainstream of America.

The lamentable and painful reality is that Black citizens are a part of "Two societies: One Black, one White; separate and unequal."

This was the grim and lugubrious assessment of the much touted "Kerner Report" corroborates the fact that Black Americans are in a period of stagnation and economic stultification.

In brief, for most Black Americans, according to the National Research Council's report "Common Destiny: Black and White Society," the socio-economic gap is widening between Black and White Americans.

It is this perilous and troubling state of affairs, coupled with recent Supreme Court decisions eroding affirmative action and equality of economic opportunities, which has prompted the NAACP to call for a national rally on Saturday, August 26, 1989 at noon. The NAACP's call for "a silent march" is needed and timely. All Americans who believe in and support an equal, fair, and caring American social order should witness in support of the NAACP's national endeavor.

Labor Day 1989 must not only be a day of celebratory activities and cerebral reflection, but a time for positive and progressive action to improve the quality of life for all 250 million Americans who comprise our nation.

Parren J. Mitchell
Former U.S. Rep.

The blood that unites

Blacks in South Africa have stepped up activist tactics. This time it was the lily white health facilities that would not admit or treat Black South Africans. It is such a contradiction that an institution for healing and saving life would not want to heal another human being because of skin color.

I read about the ongoing struggle for freedom in South Africa. I cannot help but think on the parallels between their struggles and our struggles here in America.

It is clear that Black South Africans will target for protest every institution, every practice and every custom that practices segregation by race, ever seeking the ultimate objectives — freedom and equality. This is exactly what was done in our struggle here in the United States.

My home is in Baltimore, Maryland. As I reflect on that city, and its history, Blacks went after target after target in the effort to end racial segregation. The public libraries would not hire Black librarians. That became a struggle that was won.

The police and fire departments would not hire us, and that became a struggle that was won. The fight to gain equal salaries for Black teachers was also won. Places of public accommodations became the targets, and they succumbed to the drive to end racial segregation.

City-owned recreation centers were rigidly segregated by race, but that too, had to end. The list of the struggles could go on and on.

As I reflect on that history, I am saddened over the fact that most young Black people in my city are ignorant about or oblivious to those events.

No, I am not just saddened. I am angry over the fact that our youth and under-thirty citizens take for granted the good jobs they have; the nice homes they have; the opportunities they have; the freedom from overt, lawful second class citizenship they enjoy now.

If they don't want to know our history, why should they expect Whites to know it? If they can't respect the pioneers who fought against foreboding odds, why should they expect others to respect those pioneering Black women and men who made it possible for them to achieve the status they now enjoy?

I would say to all Black citizens, "How can you ignore or stand aloof from our sisters and brothers who fight for freedom in South Africa?" We have secured sanctions against South Africa. Theoretically, we are supposed to boycott those businesses and institutions that continue to traffic with the South African Government. I wonder how many of us really participate in boycotts.

It is now time for us to come together to devise another new offensive strategy to end apartheid.

Randall Robinson, the Head of TransAfrica, delivered the commencement address this year at Sojourner-Douglass College. It is the only private Black college in Maryland, and despite racist attempts to discredit the institution and drive it out of existence; it continues to grow in its tenth year of existence.

In his address, Randall Robinson made several, powerful dramatic statements about our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Africa and throughout the world.

Early in his address, Robinson said, "You have a special responsibility to the Black world, not only the sons and daughters of Africa who live in the United States, but those who live in Mozambique, Jamaica and Brazil and those across the earth. For the real responsibility is the responsibility of empowerment of our community."

In a comment on the still racist immigration policies of Americans, he said, "We give the world that we are a generous nation. 'Give me your hungry, your huddled masses yearning to be free.' It is no wonder the Statue of Liberty sits in New York Harbor faces Europe and not in Miami facing Haiti."

Robinson, in his emotion-tugging conclusion exhorted us by saying, "Remembering always that we are sons and daughters of Africa. Remember that from Nairobi to Harlem from Soweto to Baltimore to Sojourner-Douglass, remember always for the sons and daughters of Africa that the blood that unites us is thicker than the waters that divide us."

Do we remember? Does such remembrance propel us into action?