

## SLEEPING ON THE DREAM

### The Black Bourgeoisie's Got a Brand New Bag

by Barbara Beebe

*"When you look at where the real problems are among minorities in this society, particularly blacks, it's at the bottom. It's the people who are in school systems that don't educate, neighborhoods where there [is] a lot of crime, drugs, the whole bit...to the extent that you should have any kind of efforts, it should be for those individuals who are at the bottom. Help the people who need help most, and don't just feed them this pabulum of welfare and leave them in neighborhoods that are riddled with crime, where nobody would start a business or would try to live. Don't shuttle them off into public housing, which in some instances amounts to concentration camps."*

These words were uttered in a 1987 interview about affirmative action by a man named.....Clarence Thomas. At first glance, this analysis of poor blacks seems insightful. However, close inspection reveals nothing brilliant in this statement. The Klan utters the same rhetoric, placing heavier emphasis on the ethnic make-up of the inner cities and substituting "laziness" for "pabulum." There's emphasis on the economic status of the urban black, while there is no mention or acknowledgement of racism and its affects on the victims or perpetrators. And, of course, no solutions are proposed. Welcome to the rhetoric of the emerging black conservative movement.

This statement and others like it are invariably uttered by blacks higher on the economic scale than the blacks they critique. The analysis of poverty in the black, urban community is nothing new. What is novel is the use of this rhetoric as an argument against the affirmative action and quota methods of the Civil Rights Acts' goals. These same methods were utilized and effective in creating the black middle class we see today. And this same middle class - growing increasingly conservative - is now harboring adherents to an anti-affirmative action policy.

The increasing conservatism of the black middle class should come as a surprise to no one. As hypercapitalism reaches the pinnacle of it's history - with an exceptionally small elite controlling the fate of the teeming and restless masses - the middle class becomes the valuable (and oftentimes gullible) pawn in the game. Trapped in the belief and pursuit of the American Dream, the middle class must make a difficult decision during times of economic turmoil - side with the ideology of the conservatives which emphasizes 'self-help' without government assistance, or side with the ideology of the liberals which emphasizes government intervention to combat social diseases which hinder

economic independence.

Seemingly believing they attained middle class status through free will alone, and consistently fed (through intensive media propaganda) black images as the recipients of the "pabulum of welfare," the black middle class has turned to political conservatism as a way to 'feel good' about (protect) their economic position while downplaying the influence of racism.

The methods of obtaining the goals of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - mainly affirmative action, quotas, and preferential treatment - are now under attack by black conservatives. Ineffectiveness and unfairness are supposedly the reasons for this abrupt abandonment of these methods. "Biting the hand that feeds you" is an only-too-kind way of describing this betrayal.

Ineffective? Twenty-seven years after its' inception - the Civil Rights Act and the methods of enactment - have been the backbone that has made the black middle class millions strong. This does not reflect ineffectiveness. One glance at where we are now compared to where we were 20 years ago is simply a speck of what is to come. Does anyone remember the '40s and '50s, when we really didn't matter to anyone but ourselves? Stephen Steinberg, in his article, "Occupational Apartheid", illustrates a clear understanding of the impact of affirmative action:

*"The significance of affirmative action is that it amounts to a frontal assault on the racial division of labor.... Before affirmative action, the black middle class consisted of a few businesses and professionals anchored in the ghetto economy. It was affirmative action that opened up access to mainstream occupations....Despite its limitations, affirmative action has produced the first significant departure from the occupational caste system that has prevailed since slavery."*

Does anyone remember the '60s? Pools of blood were spilt to get where we are today, and now that the black middle class can afford mops (and someone to use them) they expect to cleanse our history of this spillage and claim our methods as ineffective?!

Unfair? It is this claim that is indicative of a lack of fortitude in the conservative black middle class. Touted by angry, resentful whites, the 'unfairness' accusation has been adopted by the betrayers. There is a tendency among whites to declare that slavery is over and they should not be forced to pay for the past injustices blacks have experienced. Affirmative action is no longer a measure to "compensate for past injustices." **Racism is not a past injustice but a present crime!** And poor blacks are experiencing this crime

everyday in every public system known to man! This same racism is practiced, tolerated, fueled, ignored, fought by whites and whites are beneficiaries of this racially stratified system. Housing, banking, educational and judicial discrimination are evident and enumerated in studies by the same government that enforces racism.

Longtime civil rights activist Julian Bond critiques this line of thought, asserting "they(conservatives) scold liberals for having aimed anti-discrimination efforts at unabashedly racial monopolies" because those efforts "required whites to give up both customary privileges and substantial material rewards."

This renewed interest in fairness is morbidly ironic. The same forces who scream for 'fairness' in the employment of blacks say nothing when evidence is piled under their noses about the unfairness and racial disparity of the use of the death penalty. Fairness in employment, yet none in judicial proceedings ..... hmmm. These same folks say blacks are over sensitive to racism which is like saying gunshot wound victims are oversensitive to bullets.

Affirmative action can play tricks on the minds of blacks as well as whites. There is an ease at which one can assert that blacks have attained their status because of affirmative action, implying that without it blacks would be poor, ignorant slobs. The fact of the matter is, it is due to affirmative action and other preferential programs that so many blacks have 'made it' to the middle and upper classes. However, its effectiveness says nothing of our ability and says a lot about efforts to combat racism. For it is the racism, not lack of talent, that bars many blacks from opportunity and thus attainment.

The racism imbued in public perception is difficult to defeat. One of the primary arguments of adherents to 'reverse discrimination' doctrine is that an unqualified black was chosen over a white person for employment, advancement or admission. This scenario is a rare occurrence - it has surely happened - yet been presented as the norm for the hiring of blacks through affirmative action. Question: Who's to blame in this scenario? The black person seeking employment or admission who thinks himself qualified? or the racist employer who [a] is required to fill a quota and instead of seeking the most qualified black - as he would do for whites - hires the first black to come along and [b] realizes who will get the blame for his negligent, racist actions?

Here's an even better scenario ..... You are a white male with a bachelor's degree in (name your field). You apply for an entry level position at

## COVER STORY

(name your firm). Your workplace is predominantly white - the exceptions are the janitorial and security staff. (Don't be surprised or shocked - this is the REAL scenario of the business, entertainment, media world!) You find out from a friend in personnel that a black man was turned down for the job. He was better qualified - previous experience, higher degree -yet was not offered the job because he was black! Are you about to feel guilty, unqualified, willing to quit your job because of this injustice? Welcome to America - where this has been the typical hiring practice for umpteen years. It was okay when whites were hired because they were white, but it's not okay when blacks are hired for the same reason. It is sheer ego and obnoxiousness for whites to assume that when they are hired it is always because they are qualified!

Affirmative action is a necessary method of achieving civil rights in America because there is no other equal force available to combat racist employment practices in America. To assume that the mainstream workplace would hire blacks and then promote blacks without government prompting is to underestimate the staunch grip of racism on the Euro-American psyche.

*The House of Raeford in Raeford, North Carolina presents a paramount example of why affirmative action is needed. If one were to observe the non-unionized turkey processing plant between noon and 2 pm, one could observe institutional racism in action. Scores of black and brown faces exit the sweat box to consume their lunch in the 30 minute time limit.*

*Management, which never eats with the workers, has more time to consume a meal. Management is all white.*

*Has a black ever applied for a management position? You betcha. Are there blacks currently employed who are suitable for management? You betcha. Will blacks ever have key management positions at the House of Raeford? NO. Why? Racism. Will affirmative action be able to change this one day? You betcha.*