

ISSUES AND ACTION

"... this country is suffering from a shortage of courage and a shortage of moral fortitude."

Recently, Gary, Indiana Mayor Richard Gordon Hatcher delivered an address to the gathering of representatives of the nation's black press in its fortieth convention, in which he set forth some sobering thoughts worthy of being shared with all Americans — but particularly with Afro-Americans. Following are excerpts from remarks made before his address and the address in its entirety:

REMARKS

"... I have sat up here as we were having lunch and very frankly the history, our history, the history of black people is so thick in this room you can almost cut the air. I believe that the Black Press has played one of, if not the most important leading roles in making it possible for black people to survive and to reach the point that they have in history today.

I cannot think of any other institution, unless it is the Black Church, that has been so significant, that has been so supportive, that has been so strong, in the face of the adversities black people have experienced in this country as the Black Press. And I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all you have done, your predecessors have done in order to continue the struggle and particularly today, that which you are doing that allows some of us in public life to try to make some contribution to that struggle.

Were it not for you, some of us would not have a voice, were it not for you some of us would not be heard, were it not for you, the truth would not ever be told about some of us and I want you to know how much I appreciate it and I am certain that I speak for all of my brothers and sisters who have been elected to public office.

"... Seems that the world has been turned upside down and what used to be right, today is wrong; what used to be good, today is bad; what used to be best, is now the worst. Seems that that which is the worst in the American psychic is coming to the surface more and more everyday."

"There are really things that are extremely strange and unusual today as you meet here to discuss those issues and determine what action ought to be taken to address those issues.

ADDRESS

I suppose if we looked back over the past ten years, I suppose there has been some progress. I think it would be unrealistic to say that there has not. We're doing some things today that we never did before. We are in some places today that we never were before. Some of us have large offices, we didn't have ten years ago, and we have our names engraved on the doors of those offices and under our names we have titles that we did not have ten years ago. Some of us are able to live in fine houses today, that we could not live in before. Some of us are in neighborhoods where we could not go before.

And so for me to... tell you that things have not changed, that some progress has not been made, I think would be inaccurate, unfair and improper. The truth of the matter is, even though there are a few of us that make it a practice to attend the Ebony Fashion Fair, once a year and to look at the beautiful garments that are displayed in that show, which has become an institution in this country, truth of the matter is that we all cannot afford Pierre Cardin, Bill Blass, Yves St. Laurent and all the others. Truth of the matter is that there are still millions and millions of black people who find themselves struggling to pay their bills, struggling to support their families, struggling to maintain some kind of decent and honorable life in this country.

For some of them, they have that difficulty because they're not trying hard enough, for some of them they are faced with that kind of problem because they are not willing to make the kind of sacrifices that it takes to succeed in this difficult country, but that number is miniscule — for most of them, they find themselves in the circumstances that they are confronted with today for one reason, and one reason alone, that is because of the accident of birth, because they happened to be born into the wrong country, the wrong color of skin.

So, in this first spring of a new decade, the sure and purposeful progress of the last few years has certainly begun to falter for all people in America, but most particularly for black people.

But much of the progress that we have seen developed in the last few years has been based upon a partnership, of which the President speaks frequently, partnership that is designed to improve the lot of minorities and blacks in this country. A partnership which has in fact produced some rather tangible results. It is quite likely that by the end of this year this President would have appointed more black judges in this country than all the other presidents in the history of America put together. And I think that we must take note of that and other fruits of this partnership.

But there are some people who believe that because you enter into a partnership, because you work closely with an individual, be that your neighbor down the street or be that the President of the United States, that somehow you are obligated and required to agree with and

accept everything that that person does and everything that person says. And I have to tell you that there is more than one kind of partnership — there is a kind of active and fully participatory partnership and then on the other hand there is something called a silent partnership.

I want to say to all of you that I believe that the most serious mistake that black people could make in the summer of 1980, is to engage in a silent partnership, it is to fail to speak out when they disagree; to speak out when they find that the policies being pursued are not in the interest of themselves, their family, those who depend upon them. And so in that sense, there are some things that I must say, not because I am stupid, not because I do not recognize the clear distinction.

For every person that wants to work in this country should be able to work. So when people come to me and ask for help in getting employment and I cannot help them, I am frustrated. And I think inflation is important. I think that it's true that inflation impacts upon the poor, the most, but nevertheless for a man who does not have a job, does not have any income, inflation is not such a big deal. The truth of the matter is that America must establish as its priority putting its people back to work.

During the spring and summer of 1967, some 128 cities in this country went up in flames, this was one of them — the city of Chicago. During that time, of course, everybody got busy, in fact we did what we always do when we face a crisis in this country — we appointed a Presidential Commission. It was headed by a very courageous and I think brave man, given the context of the time, named Kerner.

In the report that came from that commission they described a typical participant in the rebellions that took place in the late 60's. They said it was a young, black, single, male, with a high school education, who was either unemployed or under-employed in a part-time, unskilled, labor-type job. Most of them were lifelong residents of the very communities that they were in the process of destroying. And the reason given by some of those participants for their actions was that they could not consider themselves to be a part of that community. In the words of one participant, he did not consider himself a true citizen of the city in which he lived.

Now some people think of that as ancient history, in fact many people in this country thought of it as ancient history until just a few weeks ago when Miami went up in smoke and in flames. The truth of the matter is, that it is not ancient history, not a whole lot of change has changed.

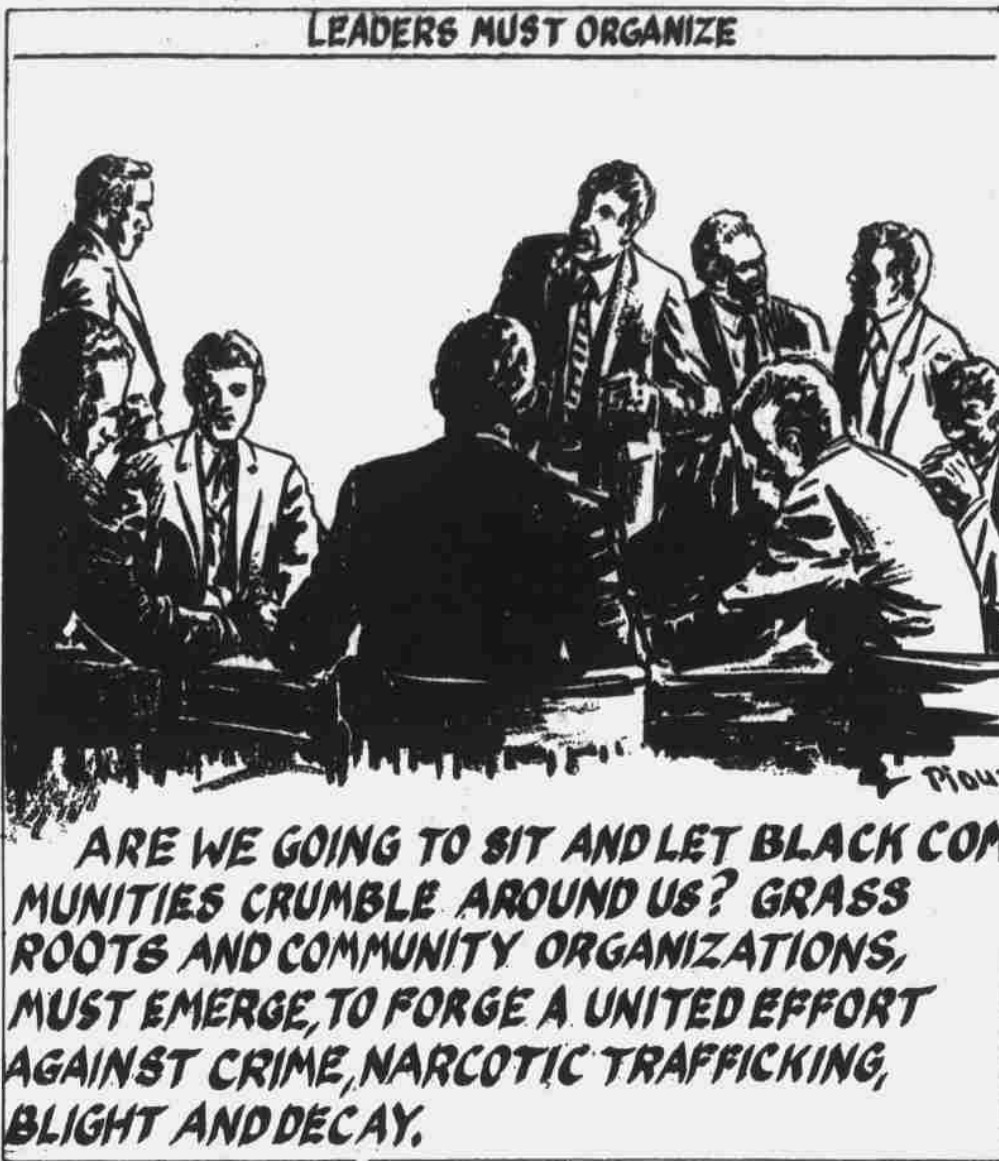
Many of those same young people are out in the streets today — they're names are different, their faces are different — their conditions are exactly the same. Most streets are still filled with young people you cannot open the doors to good education, they're still filled with young men and women who want to run corporations but can only run numbers, they're still filled with a lot of young people who dream of starting a family. And we hear a lot about the new generation and about the disregard for marriage and probably a lot of that is true, but what is also true is that we have a lot of young people today who cannot afford to get married — they just cannot afford to get married. And we have to think about what that means in terms of our society.

Our family is the most important part of our society I believe, it is the backbone for our society and I think somehow we must be very concerned about whether or not our young people are going to, first of all, learn to honor and respect the institution of marriage; secondly, are we going to be able to make it possible for them to survive in marriage. Most polls and surveys show that the thing that produces divorces the most — and when I was practicing law I could certainly attest to this — most of the people who walked into my office looking for a divorce came in when the real trouble started over money. Not enough of it and what was going to be done with that that they had.

So somehow we must recognize the threat to the very heart of our society, of our people, which is the family that is represented by the difficult economic times we face.

I don't want to be negative, there is no need to be, we are strong people, we are a special people, we are unique in the history of this country — no other group of people has had the experience that black people have had in America. No other people have suffered slavery, as black people have suffered slavery in this country. We are the only citizens of this land to whom a constitutional principle of one man, three-fifths vote was deliberately applied. We are the only citizens of this land whose first representatives in state and national legislatures were greeted with disqualification of their credentials or outright dissolution of the bodies to which they had been legally elected. We are a special people. We are the only citizens of this land for whom the poll tax and literacy tests were specifically designed. We are the only citizens of this land whose exercise of suffrage must still keep one eye on the ballot, the other eye on the bullet.

We are a special people. No one else has had the experience that black people have had in this country and that experience involves for the most part being a terribly negative experience, a devastating experience. That experience has made us strong, that experience has



given us the capability and the capacity. It has given us the ability to go through things that others perhaps would not have survived. We are a special people.

And I say to you that while the struggles of the past were difficult, I fear that the struggle that we face in the future will be even more so. Don't be complacent, don't think as too many do that we have it made. We do not have it made. Some people tell me after all, Mayor Hatcher, more than 4300 blacks have been elected to public office. This is quantitatively more than just a few years ago. North and south, east and west with increasing frequency there are black mayors, black congressmen, black judges, black councilmen, black school board members and black legislators. I say to you, unfortunately the unencumbered access to democracy is still not ours.

Consider for example, this past primary season. We have just completed the longest, most expensive, and most geographically-balanced primary campaign in our nation's history. Fortunately, it appears that the country will survive. Yet, before we congratulate ourselves too much, there are two facts about the campaign of 1980 that should be especially worrisome to us all.

The first fact is that the campaign was considered over almost as soon as it had begun. By the time the campaign trains of various and sundry candidates had made their way from the cornfields of Iowa to the snowy villages of New Hampshire, for all intents and purposes everyone concluded that Governor Reagan and President Carter had insurmountable leads. In 1956, Dwight Eisenhower was elected President because the black community did not support Adlai Stevenson as strongly as he needed them to support him. Similarly, the black vote in the highly industrialized states was the key to the presidential elections of 1960, 1968, and 1976. In 1980, however, none of these states had cast a single ballot prior to the time that the national media had signed, sealed, and delivered both the Republican and Democratic nominations.

No Show

For Black Agenda

Earlier this year, more than three hundred organizations, representing blacks throughout the country met in Richmond, Virginia, to frame a black agenda for the decade of the eighties. Every single presidential candidate was invited on at least two separate occasions to appear before the conference to explain his platform in relation to that agenda. Not a single one of them came. Not one came. As though they had borrowed a page from the Great Compromise of 1877, press and presidential candidate alike considered the black American irrelevant to the presidential primaries of 1980. In fact, one presidential candidate, whom I will not name, said he could not make it to Richmond that Sunday because the Massachusetts primary was that Tuesday and he would be campaigning in Massachusetts.

Consider a second fact and I think you ought to think about that, these primaries, both the Democratic and Republican nominees were almost elected before they ever got to a state where there were any substantial numbers of black people. So the truth of the matter is blacks had very little to say about who was going to be president of the United States the next time around, under the system that we are currently operating.

Consider in an interview on the evening before the June 3 California primary, Governor Jerry Brown criticized network coverage of the campaign for modeling itself after the "Wide World of Sports" program by emphasizing the numbers and not the issues of the 1980 campaign. What is most interesting about the numbers game that was played by the networks is that the numbers were used to explain.

Whether it was Lynn Scherer of ABC, Bruce Morton of CBS, or Teddy White of NBC, in almost every post-primary analysis, the numbers were interpreted to reflect voter concern about the character of each candidate. On the Democratic side, the question of Campaign '80 became whether voters would rather trust a former peanut farmer who happened to have an overly-ambitious

banker as a friend or a Senator whose mystical lineage was tarnished by the tragedy of a late-night drive on Chappaquiddick. On the Republican side, the question became whether voters would trust a here-today, gone-tomorrow former Ambassador who had most recently emerged from the dark recesses of the CIA or an aged former Governor whose best performances seem to be reserved for the IRS.

Yet, clearly what the primary returns of 1980 should indicate is not a concern about the character of the candidates, but a concern about the character of our country. Some voters may well have concluded that our nation's character was being tested by those who hold fifty of our fellow citizens hostage in Tehran. However, at least six, seven, or even eight million people today who are out of work, I am sure believe that our national character is being tested by their hopeless unemployment much more so than those fifty people in Iran.

Some voters may have concluded that our national character was being tested by our ability to secure our borders against the Soviet tanks that now roll across the plains of Afghanistan. However, many, many more voters in 1980 believe our national character is being tested by our apparent inability to secure their pocketbooks against the double-digit ravages of inflation.

Some voters may have concluded that our national character was being tested by our ability to balance a budget. Many, many more realize that that character awaits its true test in the balancing of an imbalanced society.

So I say to you, it is not so much whether we are able to balance the budget but it is whether we are able to provide a balanced justice, balanced equality, in this country. Balancing the budget will not solve all of our problems, in fact I suspect it will not solve any of our problems. But if we were able and prepared to make the kind of commitment that said no matter what color, or race of a person who was a citizen of this country, that person is going to receive the same kind of treatment that every other person receives, if we were able to make that kind of commitment, then I believe that the fight would be worth the effort. We have not come as far as we have come, you as individuals, who have had to struggle against great odds, had to overcome great obstacles, some of you have published at the peril of your life — you who have come through all of that I don't think you got this far simply saying that we cannot solve these problems, simply saying that the problems are so complex, they are so difficult that they cannot be overcome. I believe that you got where you are because you did not believe there was a problem that did not have a solution. I believe you got where you are not dealing in machinations, not being operators, not doing in many instances the politic thing, but doing what you believed was right and true and correct.

And I believe if there is anything that this country is suffering from today, that it is not suffering from a shortage of money, it is not suffering from a shortage of material goods, it is suffering from a shortage of courage and a shortage of moral fortitude. There is no other way I can put it. What we need, I believe honestly in America today, is a few good people, a few good men and women who are willing to stand up and tell the truth, no matter who it hurts and no matter what the consequences.

So I was supposed to talk about Why Vote? I think we ought to vote, I think it is important that we vote but I think what is more important than that is that we vote for people who are willing to display the kind of courage that is needed today in this country. The kind of people who are willing to make certain that all those folks who gave their lives, and I will not call the roll, but who made the ultimate sacrifice and all those who made other sacrifices, their careers, their businesses in order to make it possible for us to be able to vote. I don't think there is any need for a greater reason to vote than the fact that that's the sacrifice that they made for us to be able to do it. Beyond that, we ought to select these persons running for public office who are willing to speak the truth, select those persons who are willing to remember where they came from,

HAPPINESS THROUGH HEALTH

by Otto McClarrin

Motorcycle Safety: Visibility Can Mean Survival — Anyone who mounts the saddle of a motorcycle has got to think about survival. Accidents — bad accidents — come easy for the cyclist. He has all of the hazards of automobile travel plus several of his own.

In addition, when an accident occurs it is likely to be spectacular and the injuries severe. The cyclist doesn't have the built-in protection of an automobile, imperfect as that is.

A prominent middle-aged man in an eastern city decided to abandon the bumper to bumper rush hour scene in favor of a motorcycle with its convenience and economy. It was no one's fault, really, and it was a low-speed accident. But that split second when the auto driver couldn't see the motorcycle in the intersection left the cyclist a mass of broken bones. After months in the hospital, he recovered enough to return to work, but he will spend the rest of his life knowing pain in his deformed and crippled body.

Visibility Is Very Important — That's the message government and private industry safety experts are sounding to try to prevent such accidents: if you get on a motorcycle be sure the cars and trucks on the road can see you.

During the day, bright-colored clothing and even headlights may help. At night they suggest lavish use of retro-reflective material on clothing and sides of the motorcycle (in addition to headlights, of course). This is the same material that is used to produce the highway and street signs that "light up" at night.

The safety helmet continues to be the best single factor in cutting the death and injury risk when accidents do occur. (And they do occur: 328,000 in one year recently, with 2,410 fatalities).

So important is the safety helmet that nearly every state has passed strict laws requiring their use. It was too late, however, for one young man — let's just call him Jimmy Jones — who was a passenger on a motorcycle ride home from a nearby college town in a southern state. The driver died instantly; Jimmy lay in a coma for weeks, awakening finally with severe brain damage. He lives in apparent good physical health, but the once-promising young man will eventually move into an institution after his parents can no longer care for him at home.

In this case, the helmet would have reduced the risk dramatically and might have saved his companion. Individuals and special groups in some states today are trying desperately to get the compulsory helmet laws repealed. Traffic safety experts estimate that in one state which still lacks helmet laws, there will be 600 motorcycle fatalities this year, 150 of which would be prevented with helmet use.

There are other protections recommended by injury control specialists:

- Goggles or face shield, to improve vision and protect against flying gravel, etc.

- Tough clothing to help absorb the scrapes, scratches, cuts and bumps — leather jacket and gloves, sturdy trousers and footwear even in hot weather.

- A vehicle equipped with rear view mirror and windshield.

These protective measures together with good driving skill and judgment can let the motorcycle be a convenient, fun and economical AND safe way to get around.

"One should never put on one's best trousers to go out to battle for freedom and truth."

—Henrick Ibsen

remember how they got where they are, and are willing to continue in that office to work on behalf of the poor, in behalf of those who are today being discriminated against, on behalf of those who today are the victims of a racist society, who are willing, if necessary, to lose their offices in order to win justice. Those are the kinds of people I think we ought to vote for and we ought to elect to public office.

And I want to say to you in your powerful positions — because the Black Press is powerful — in your powerful positions it is my hope that you will continue to speak the truth even if the big daily newspapers do not speak the truth, I hope you will continue to speak the truth. I hope you will continue to protect those as you have in the past who put their necks on the line in an effort to create justice in this unjust country. I hope you will continue, in short, to be what you always have been — supporter, protector, defender of truth, real liberty in these United States of America.

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