

Washington, D.C. has lost its Southern charm

By Marc Rotterman
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Recently, on one of my frequent trips to Washington, D.C., I had the occasion to be driven by an 80-year-old black gentleman who had been driving a cab for more than 50 years.

Having grown up in the suburbs of Washington, and being somewhat of a student of the district and its neighborhoods, I found it very interesting to talk with this man.

We began our conversation by talking about jazz and Duke Ellington. Both of us agreed that Ellington was "America's 20th century Beethoven." We also noted that it was not commonly known that Ellington was born and raised in Washington.

Ellington was buried in New York City. Many folks presumed that Ellington was a product of the Big Apple because he played the Cotton Club and other clubs in Harlem and spent the majority of his early adulthood in the city.

However, he grew up in the area of 14th and U St. N.W. in Washington, which was a middle-class, black neighborhood in the early part of this century. In fact, Duke's father was a butler at the White House.

In the 1960s and 1970s, 14th and U Streets were the "red light" district of Washington. In the 1980s the AIDS epidemic and police crackdowns virtually shut down the prostitution trade in the area. In that same city block, the ravages of crime and the 1960s riots have not yet

faded from the scarred buildings and storefronts.

My cabbie friend imparted to me that he had every album that the "Duke" had recorded and that he even had a recording on which Richard Nixon, playing host to a White House 70th birthday party for Ellington, sat down at the piano and asked everyone to sing Happy Birthday to the Duke "in the key of C."

We also agreed that Duke's sidemen in his horn section were second to none. They aren't making artists like Johnny Hodges, Coleman Hawkins, or Harry Carney anymore.

Gradually our discussion turned to D.C. and the disintegration of some of the "old neighborhoods." We talked

about the violence that haunts the nation's capital: the high intensity crime, the gunfire, the gang-bangers that have no respect for life - not theirs or anyone else's.

In fact, during the last three months, three D.C. police officers have been slain. One officer was murdered while sitting in his patrol car. Marion Barry, a long-time opponent of the death penalty, now wants to allow the death penalty for anyone convicted of killing a police officer.

This octogenarian cab driver blamed the children for having children with no respect for the consequences. I asked him about the request by some on the D.C. Council to have federal troops in D.C. and for the federal government to take over the district police force. The old gen-

tleman thought for a moment before he spoke. Then he indicated that he would favor troops in gang-infiltrated areas and that he had no confidence in Marion Barry ability to run the city.

Our conversation moved on. We talked about the days before the Metro (Washington's subway system) when Congress ran the district government. Then Washington was a small town with a Southern charm. As I departed the cab on Capitol Hill I wished the old gentleman well. But as I walked away I could not help but wonder what lay ahead for that distinguished gentleman who had seen the city he loved become a war zone.

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Letters to The Post Is every voice ready to sing?

"Lift Every Voice and Sing!" These words are so profound, they touch every part of my black soul with unbridled pride. Resounding in my ears with such resonance, that it brings me to tears upon the first chord played and the sound of it being sung. Words so carefully penned by James Weldon and Rosemond Johnson in 1900. However, it is with tears I express my emotion of sorrow that I come in contact with young people that refuse to hear of the trials and triumphs of our people of color. Why?

"Stony the road we trod." Drs. Bethune, King and DuBois fought diligently for equality of life, jobs and importantly education. I used these as examples to send a message to our youth and their parents. Dr. Bethune, with \$1.50 and her faith in God opened a school. Her mission was to educate Negro children. Her work during the Roosevelt administration of the 1930s and 40s is a remarkable achievement of our race's stride toward the quest for equality, opportunity and a better standard of living for future generations and should never go unnoticed. Dr. King escalated these steps by organizing a national movement of great magnitude, by taking it to the degree of achieving voting rights and equal civil liberties for all people. So that we would never be held under "the bitter chastening rod."

Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, a man who dictated to us almost 95 years ago the importance of the "talented tenth," The 10 percent of our educated people to lead the masses to an insured life of equality in education and civil liberties. Voting was the most important of these civil liberties. It is these achievements that are most important for our children to learn and live by in order to preserve ethnicity and remain ethnocentric in the most acceptable way possible.

We must not use our former symbols of racial identity as symbols of folly and stereotypical radicalism, but fashion them for what they mean. We must return ourselves and our children as one family unit back into our churches, a place which was our source strength in times of crisis. Additionally, we must provide our children with the stories of our ancestors from whence they come, and the measures they used to sustain the future generations to come, the tools to survive to the present; Stressing the need for future generations to continue to flourish.

Finally, teach our children about their history in every corner of the earth, and "let it resound loud as the rolling sea."

William Davis Jr.
Albany, Ga.

What's on your mind?

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Woods' heritage tip of multiracial debate

By George Wilson

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Just a few days ago the world was stunned when 21-year-old Tiger Woods won the Master's golf tournament with a record score. Immediately, after Woods' victory, there was great jubilation in many parts of the African-American community.

The euphoria was caused by the fact that someone who looked like many African Americans had broken down a barrier in the world of sports. While many were basking in "the brother's" accomplishment, Woods repeated his position that he is not solely an African American even though his father clearly qualifies.

Woods, like many others is a product of a mixed marriage between an African American and in this case a person of Asian descent. In the early days of America, to be classified black only required a small amount of African American blood (1/16th). More importantly, if you had "the look," it didn't matter about your bloodline, you simply took your place with other people of color. On the heels of Woods' victory and the discussion of how he and others of similar circumstances should be classified, the House of Representatives got into the act. The House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight held hearings on the Office of Management and Budget's definition of race and ethnicity. The OMB has issued

Directive 15, a new way of classifying Americans. The idea is that when the next census rolls around, there will be two changes in how survey takers can describe themselves. The new options will be: 1) 'Multiracial or biracial' and 2) 'Check more than one category.' Several civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, and The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies have written letters to OMB officials expressing their opposition to the addition of 'multiracial' classification on the year 2000 census.

During the hearing, representatives of the Census Bureau were joined by members of the Congressional Black Caucus on separate panels. Among the witnesses for the CBC was Rep. Carrie Meek (D-Fla.). Meek began her presentation by telling the committee about her experiences growing up in a segregated Florida and how she had to attend graduate school in Michigan because no graduate school in her home state would admit African Americans. Perhaps, if Meek had used the definition that some would prefer, she could have avoided a trip to Michigan by claiming her Indian heritage. "I understand how Tiger Woods and the rest of them feel. But no matter how they feel from a personal standpoint, we are thinking about the census and reporting accuracy so that government and other agencies can make accurate decisions. Historical discrimination has been

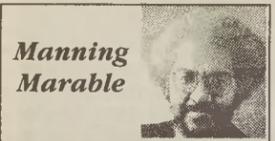
assigned to a single racial category, more than likely those who are black. There is no court or any legislative legal record of discrimination against multiracials," Meek observed.

At the root of this debate over classification is the desire of some to push aside one part of their background in exchange for an identity that they think will provide greater access to the mainstream of society. Unfortunately, as Rep. Meek noted such efforts will not produce the desired results. "Individuals like Mr. Woods who designate themselves as multiracial on the Census form will not reduce by any amount the discrimination they will face. Usually, the amount of discrimination a person feels is based on appearance and not on racial classification. The multiracial classification will just make it more difficult to identify where discrimination has taken place," he said.

OMB, the House of Representatives and others say they just want to include Americans who go unrecognized. In my years on the planet, it seems clear to me and others that this country has had little difficulty in defining someone's race. Adding another classification would only serve to further muddy the murky waters of race relations.

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The conservative courtship of Farrakhan



Politics makes strange bedfellows. Consider the case of Louis Farrakhan. Two years ago at the Million Man March Farrakhan symbolized for many, a strong black challenge to white authority. But even then there were signs that many white Republicans were comfortable with Farrakhan's message of self help, entrepreneurship and social conservatism.

The budding romance between Farrakhan and white conservatives finally flowered several weeks ago at a luxury retreat in Boca Raton, Fla. Farrakhan was the guest of Jude Wanniski, an influential right-wing economist who has served as an advisor to both Ronald Reagan and former Vice-Presidential candidate Jack Kemp. The guest list at Wanniski's gathering read

like the directory of white conservatism: Robert Novak and Rowland Evans, conservative columnists; House Budget Chairman John Kasich; and Republican Senator John Ashcroft.

Robert Novak, a bitter opponent of both affirmative action and civil rights in general, cooed like a lovestruck teenager over Farrakhan. Novak wrote that Farrakhan "was knocking on the Republican Party's door," and argued that "some response might be appropriate."

Novak understood that in the context of the American political system, "Minister Farrakhan has been branded an anti-Semite and no repudiation of bigotry by him will suffice. He is viewed with such loathing by the Jewish community that any effort to talk with him to pursue racial harmony is prohibited." Yet from the standpoint of white conservatism, Novak and others have recognized that Farrakhan shares many of their reactionary values. For example, black conservative radio commentator Armstrong Williams



Conservatives like Louis Farrakhan's self-help message.

praised Farrakhan's emphasis on self help, declaring to Novak "He sounds like us."

However, the real story behind the Boca Raton meeting was far more complex than the recent headlines revealed. What was really at work was a convergence of parallel interests, rather than a political marriage. White conservatives had come calling to Farrakhan because both parties recognized they can use each other for their own respective purposes.

Let us try to interpret this event from the perspective of Minister Farrakhan. The Million Man March of October, 1995, was unquestionably the largest public gathering of African Americans in U.S. histo-

ry. The NAACP and establishment politicians clearly have lost legitimacy and touch with the masses of their own people. Farrakhan should have become a major U.S. figure at that time, because no other public leader could have brought one million people into the streets anywhere in the country.

However, Farrakhan was unable to consolidate any lasting political capital from this massive event. The National African-American Leadership Summit headed by Chavis proved to be badly organized and ineffective. There was little political follow-up with the hundreds of local march organizing committees.

Outside of the black communi-

ty a number of both liberal and conservative white leaders still refused to have anything to do with him. The Nation of Islam's private security firm had been pushed out of contracts protecting public housing projects with the federal government. Farrakhan and NOI speakers were often harassed and barred from campuses. Indirectly, black leaders who have had dealings with Farrakhan in the past were severely pressured to denounce him. The best example here is Kweisi Mfume, head of the NAACP. When Mfume was a member of Congress it was not unusual for him to visit the local NOI temple in Baltimore. Mfume himself, as head of the Congressional Black Caucus, had endorsed efforts to build unity between black elected officials, the NAACP then led by Benjamin Chavis, and the NOI.

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There's no room at inn, especially for black folks

By Kofi Opantiri
SPECIAL TO THE POST

A newspaper article recently reported that "55 national black groups have developed a survey that rated the hotel industry poorly on 'its inclusion of African Americans in all aspects of its operations.'" The NAACP spearheaded study forms the basis of a call by these 55 organizations and the NAACP for a boycott of targeted hotels.

The issue raised by the study is a completely valid line of inquiry and action: businesses that are the recipients of black dollars owe our community a reasonable return for our business. This principle applies equally to all communities, not just ours. That the American

African community as a whole does not receive its fair share of "corporate reciprocity" is testimony to the enduring vitality of white supremacy racism in America that continues to marginalize and ignore our community. More importantly, it is testimony to the insufficient levels of unity, organization and development (economic, political, and cultural) that yet prevail in Black America.

As valid as the issue of "corporate reciprocity" may be, in the matter of the hotels record in this area vis a vis the African American community, the overall condition of American blacks indicates that a response which is much more vigorous than the study and boycott is in order. Most curiously, such a response

was suggested to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored (African) People and the representatives of 150 groups but has gone ignored.

The occasion of the suggestion was a 1990 economic summit convened by the venerable civil rights organization spend \$16 billion each year attending conventions, yet American - Africans do not own one major hotel in the United States.

A vigorous response to this sad state of affairs was suggested by Mr. Brown and is a relatively straight forward plan. Cancel all meetings for one year. Use a mere \$3 billion of the saved \$16 billion to purchase hotels that would allow the establishment of an econom-

ic infrastructure for the black community.

There are 20 urban areas in the United States where more than 50 percent of American - Africans reside. According to Mr. Brown, a first rate hotel in any of these top twenty markets can be purchased for \$200 million with a 10 percent down payment of \$20 million. With \$400 million (the annual interest on the \$3 billion), hotels can be purchased in all twenty markets.

Black economic development would make a tremendous leap forward if such a plan was implemented. We would be better positioned to ameliorate many of the ills in our community without outside help:

unemployment, poor housing, second rate education, inadequate health care, and the like. Our clout in the American economic structure would be significantly increased. That increased clout could be leveraged to more effectively bring about corporate reciprocity in our community from all businesses, not just hotels, that is currently possible.

In short, Mr. Brown's plan would be a great step toward true liberation for African people if we possessed the will to make it happen. Given its stature, the NAACP is a likely candidate to spearhead the plan into reality.

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