

# Toward a real conversation about race

## Manning Marable



When President Clinton announced the creation of a national commission to address the state of race relations, many African Americans were understandably skeptical. After all, Clinton had in the previous year signed a welfare bill which unfairly punished women and children of color. He had failed to offer strong support to the proponents of affirmative action. His administration had done next to nothing to rebuild and revitalize urban ghettos. And Clinton was all but mute when confronted with widespread cases of police brutality and systematic violence against African-American and Latino communities.

However, Clinton's selection of venerable historian Dr. John Hope Franklin to head the commission instantly gave the effort credibility. Three generations of black Americans have learned about themselves and the richness of their people's history from Dr. Franklin's works. His classic interpretation of the African American experience, "From Slavery to Freedom," set the standard for scholarship in Black Studies. As chairman of the advisory board, Dr. Franklin hopes that his panel "will turn the corner for this nation once and for all with respect to the question of race." The commission has set a schedule of twelve months in which it must issue recommendations to the president. Dr. Franklin states that the adoption of an effective plan of action may represent a "decisive moment" or "watershed" in the construction of positive race relations. So far, the seven-member panel, which includes three whites, two African Americans, one Latino, and one Asian American, hasn't done much. But we should suspend critical judgments until the agenda of the commission becomes clear.

If this nation was truly committed to a real "conversation on race," we would want to put on the table many concerns which white elected officials avoid like the plague. We might begin with the observation that prejudice is never an accidental element within the makeup of a society.

Hatred does not emerge in a social vacuum. Bigotry is not natural or inevitable within human beings. All white people, simply because they are born white, do not have to be racist. All males, just because they are born male, don't have to tolerate sexism, or sexual harassment of women on the job. Intolerance is a social consequence of how society is organized, and we cannot uproot bigotry unless we are also willing to examine seriously the economic and social environment which fosters and perpetuates social inequality and unfairness.

Fear is reproduced when people are taught that the "other" — the Latinos or blacks or undocumented immigrants—threatens to take their jobs. Fear hardens into hatred when politicians deliberately create racial scapegoats and homophobic stereotypes to win elections. When politicians deliberately play the so-called "race card," or now the "lesbian/gay card," they create the environment for hate groups and vigilante violence.

If the presidential commission truly wants to understand the contemporary dynamics of institutional

racism, it should go first to the prisons and jails across this country, conversing with black, brown and poor inmates. The criminal justice system today has become our chief means of regulating and controlling millions of unemployed and under-educated black and Latino young men. What lynching was in the South when John Hope Franklin grew up in the 1920s and 1930s, the death penalty and life sentences without parole have become in the 1990s.

As of 1997, there are 1.7 million inmates in US prisons and jails. In California alone, the number of prisoners which stood at 19,000 two decades ago, has now exceeded 150,000 today. Prison construction has become a multi-billion dollar business, as small towns compete for new prison sites. Since 1990, the number of prison and jail guards nationwide has grown by 30 percent, to over 600,000. We are constructing about 150 new prison cells every single day in the United States.

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DG  
Martin



## If he loves mother and work

"If he loves his mother and his work, he is a pretty good risk."

This is a rule — a rule of thumb. It sorts out men who are likely to be worth a long-term investment of commitment. It distinguishes them from those who might be riskier.

Three of us — all men — are eating lunch together. We are talking about this rule.

"The Rule," as we come to call it, is the wisdom of one of our spouses. We agree that it is a pretty good rule. And we laugh happily about it. Pretty likely, we tell each other, that someone who loves his mother and takes care of her will also be considerate of his wife. And one who loves his work will be a good partner to his spouse as well.

But why shouldn't we like the rule? All three of us are mama's boys — unapologetically so. And we are happy at work.

How disgustingly self-glorifying we are to endorse a rule that seems to make us look like such wonderful catches. But, then, no matter that we loved our mothers, we are still men who like to think we are something special. One of our mothers is still alive.

Mine has now been dead for two years. And the mother of the other died two days before this lunch. She went suddenly. Her last, loving, motherly, telephone message is still on the answering machine.

"Sugar, I wonder if you have thought of that..." Her voice still speaks.

But she is gone. We sit around the table celebrating her and the other mothers, too. We talk some more about The Rule.

"If he loves his mother and his work, he is a pretty good risk."

The Rule, we assure each other, has been adopted at the highest levels of one of our big banks and at the top of one of the largest financial firms on Wall Street. We know some of the higher-ups. They are using The Rule to sort out those who are destined to be happily successful in business. They understand, we tell each other, that people who take care of their mothers and like their jobs are going to be good business leaders.

In the midst of this ongoing affirmation of mother love, I begin to wonder why some of us love our parents so much — and have that love reciprocated. And why some parents and children suffer a lifetime of estrangement and disappointment.

Do we love our parents mostly because they loved us first and took such good care of us? Or is it just in the genes? Something that pushes us to admire and love them — and they us?

Or is it part of a strong cultural drive that affects some of us and misses others?

Or, is love of mothers just symptomatic of a general optimistic-upbeat-state of mind? That kind of person may tend to do the things that make other people happy-including parents, but not limited to them. Later, I asked the spouse who was the source of the rule how she came to propound it.

"It was not meant a rule. I had decided somewhere along the way that — if I were going to be involved with someone over a long period of time — that one who loved his mother or who had loved his mother would himself be the happiest of men. Such a person would, I thought, because of the background and depth of that relationship, more likely have an appreciation of the really good things about life.

Former Charlotte attorney and Davidson College graduate D.G. MARTIN recently left his job as vice president of public affairs for the UNC system.



## Real men giving real time to African American youth

By Kevin Patterson  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Two new friends have a phone conversation that lasts more than an hour. "I'm going to kick his butt tomorrow at school if he says anything else to me," says the younger friend. "Why are you going to let someone else control you," the older one answers. "Don't waste your time fighting." The result was no fight.

This was a conversation between a new mentor/mentee team set up by the Greater Charlotte Chapter of 100 Black Men of America. The relationship is designed to have one of the members of The 100 work with a young African American male, mentee in developing life skills. The Charlotte chapter is a part of a national organization committed to working with African American youth.

Recently Nike produced a public service announcement for the 100 Black Men of America. The powerful 30 second spot depicts challenges young African American men face and shows how 100 Black Men of America changes lives. The tag line is "What They See Is What They'll Be." As president of the Greater

Charlotte Chapter of 100 Black Men of America I see more than a glimpse of what life offers our young men. I also see how African American men can and do change lives.



Patterson

Too often we only hear about the negative experiences of African American youth. The positive work that our children do, for the most, goes unreported. And work of African American men helping youth is reported even less.

As Charlotte discusses America's curse — racism — we must support organizations like the 100, Save the Seed and others that work daily with our youth, serving as role models, expanding educational opportunities and mentoring programs.

Over the past six years, the Greater Charlotte Chapter of 100 Black Men of America has been making a positive difference in the lives of many African American youth in our community. Our mission is to increase edu-

### 100 Black Men of Charlotte

cational opportunities, empower success, provide role models and strengthen community support for our youth. Our programs include mentoring, tutoring, job shadowing, youth volunteerism and a scholarship program.

Our results to date have been promising. The high school graduation rate of our students was an impressive 86 percent for the 1996-97 school year with an expectation of 100 percent for the Class of '98. College entrance will go from 56 percent to nearly 100 percent this year. Our Movement of Youth program was awarded the No. 1 prevention program in North Carolina by the Department of Public Instruction and the Department of Human Resources.

Martin Wilkins, one of our mentees from Charlotte Latin, was recognized this year as the most outstanding student in a North Carolina prevention program. Another mentee, Maurice Loce, who graduated from Independence High School with honors, received national recognition from the national office of

100 Black Men of America for outstanding performance. He is currently a sophomore at Morehouse College. These results have been achieved by a group of young African American males that many social experts project will fail, enter jails and become a burden to society. Based on the results of the Greater Charlotte Chapter of 100 Black Men America the so called "at risk student" is less of a risk when they can see and interact with positive role models that look like them.

Our job shadowing program, which now incorporates the Charlotte Chamber and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system is another program that allows our members to see African American men in business leadership positions. The job shadowing program "Dare to Achieve" has been so successful it has grown to include over 400 students and volunteers from 43 schools and 82 businesses.

After working with our mentees during their middle and high school years we make certain post secondary education is financially possible. The 100

Black Men sponsors two major sporting events as fund raisers. Each spring we conduct a United States Tennis Association sanctioned Charity Tennis Tournament that attracts more than 300 tennis players. Every fall we sponsor the Carolinas Football Classic between South Carolina State University and North Carolina A & T State University. This year the game will be played Nov. 22 at Ericsson Stadium. Both of these fund raisers support our scholarship fund and other programs.

Our slogans say it all: "investing in America's Greatest Resource... Our Youth" and "Real Men Giving Real Time." The Greater Charlotte Chapter of 100 Black Men America will continue to invest in our youth. Even though news reports about efforts within the African American community to help ourselves may be rare, we will continue to offer our time, our talent and our funds to ensure our youth have a productive future. We welcome support from all segments of the community.

KEVIN PATTERSON is president of the Greater Charlotte Chapter of 100 Black Men.

## Will hate crimes cease after Clinton conference?

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson  
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

In June three young whites were arrested and charged with burning down a small black church in Southwest Alabama. One of the suspects said, "Let's go burn the nigger church." The day before he had attended a local Klan rally.

The timing of the attack was significant. The week before, President Clinton in a national radio address swore to "mount an all out assault on hate crimes" in America. Clinton assured that the assault would begin with his White House Conference on hate crimes on Nov. 10. At the conference, hate crime victims will tell of attacks on them, and law enforcement officials will testify about their efforts to put hate mongers out of business.

It's a noble effort, but victim's stories, moral appeals, and official pronouncements tell little about why hate crimes continue to terrify many African Americans. Two weeks before the conference the Imperial

Klans of America mocked Clinton's call to end hate by inviting the "white public" to a day-long rally in Kentucky. There were bible-laced speeches, souvenir tables loaded with Klan caps, flags, cards, balloons and a ceramic statuette of a hooded Klansman with glowing red eyes. The rally closed with the burning of a giant cross. The media ignored them, law enforcement officials ridiculed them as a handful of pathetic crackpots, and civil rights organizations wrote their obituary.

Yet behind their circus antics, and apparent microscopic numbers hate groups like the Klan have grown since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, and are more dangerous than ever. At last count, there were 858 identifiable paramilitary groups operating in all 50 states. In 1996, they spent an estimated \$100 million on explosive manuals, weapons, and survival gear. They held "Preparedness Expos" in six cities that drew thousands of participants, visitors, and

dozens of exhibitors. They had 250 web sites, and dozens of publications.

But what hasn't changed is that African Americans remain the number one target of hate violence, and are the victims of the most violent attacks. In the more than 30 documented hate crime murders in 1995 and 1996 more than half the victims were black. And despite denials by some law enforcement officials, and much of the media, there was much evidence that some of the arson attacks on black churches were part of an organized racist conspiracy.

After much pressure and protest from civil rights groups, Congress passed the Hate Crimes Statistics Act in April 1990. FBI officials promised that they would permanently count hate crimes in their annual Uniform Crime Report. The FBI has, but the number it reports annually are almost certainly vastly understated. Four out of five victims of hate crimes do not report them because they are too fearful or

feel the police and local officials will do little or nothing to protect them. There's a good reason for their worry.

The response to hate crimes from states, cities, and police agencies wildly vary. Under the Hate Crimes Act only 32 states submitted any data to the FBI on hate crimes in 1995, and only 17 states require reporting and recording of hate crimes separate from those required by the federal statute. Only 35 percent of all police agencies have hate task force units or specific procedures for dealing with hate crimes.

Eight states still have no laws on the books targeting racially motivated hate crimes. Some states allow hate violence to be prosecuted as "stand alone" crimes, meaning the acts themselves can be punished, while others permit the prosecution of hate crimes only if they are committed in conjunction with another crime. Also, only a handful of states permit judges to increase penalties when racial bias is proven as the motive for the crime.

While the number of racial hate crimes are much smaller than the millions of "common" crimes in America, the social and political damage they wreak is much greater. When individuals are victimized solely because of their race, this deepens racial fears and frustration, reinforces "us vs. them" divisions between whites and blacks, and increases the danger of a racial explosion or violence. The turmoil following the Rodney King beating and the alleged sexual torture of Haitian immigrant, Abner Louima by white police officers are deadly examples.

Violent hatemongers with their bombs, guns, fists, crosses, threats, web sites, and publications have laid down the challenge. Let's see how decisively the federal government confronts it when Clinton's hate crimes conference ends.

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