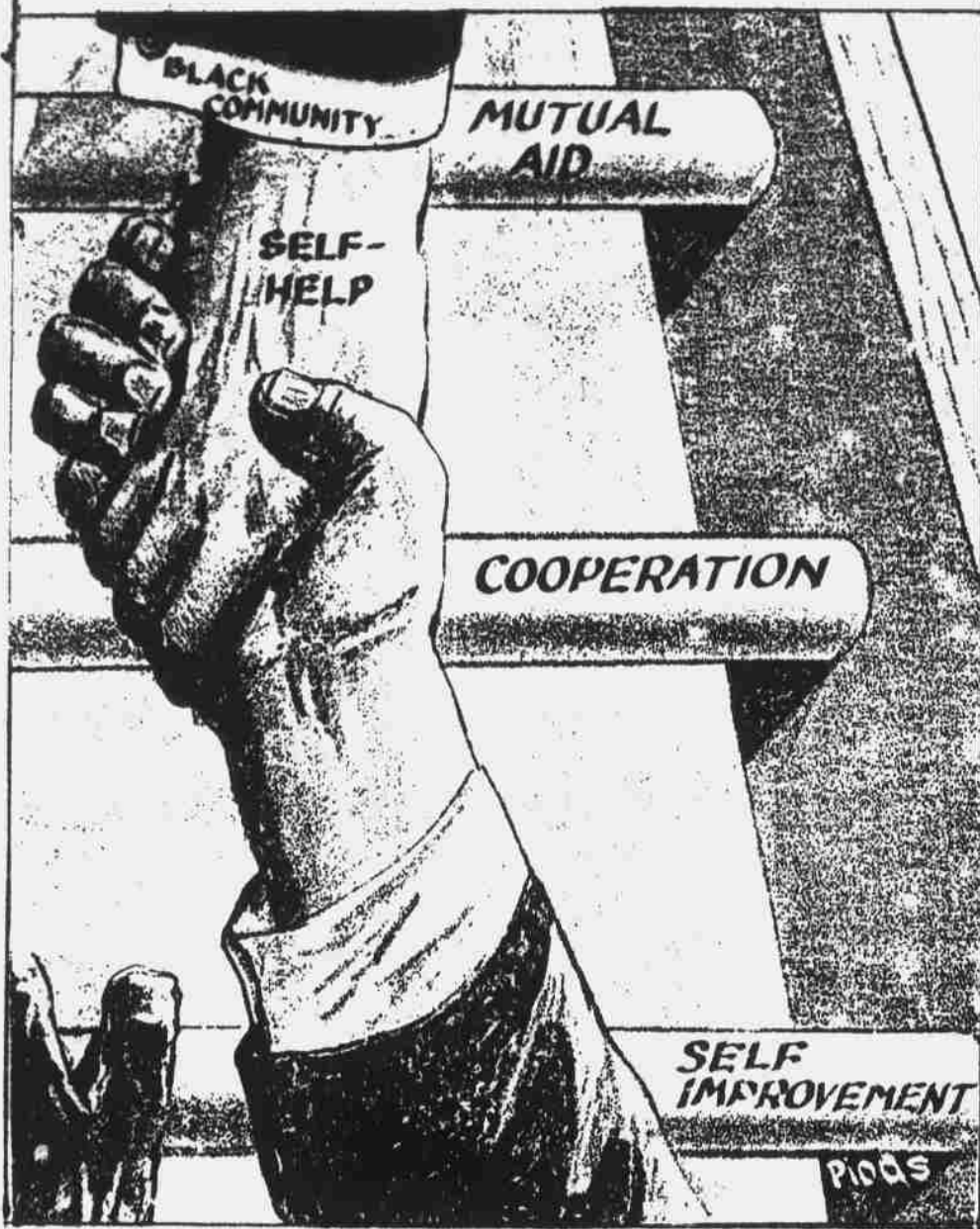


1980

1980

BLACK BOOT-STRAPS



AFFIRMATIVE ACTION COORDINATING CENTER

"Debt Slavery"

By Gerald C. Horne, Esq.

The ravages of slavery in itself are sufficient basis for affirmative action. Forced, unpaid labor, preventing Blacks from reading and obtaining education, coercive violation of Black women, etc. present not only an argument for affirmative action but beyond that it argues for massive reparations—at least along the lines provided to various Jewish communities after World War II.

And, of course, no one need not debate that present day discrimination itself cries out for the corrective of affirmative action with quotas. But between the Scylla of slavery and the Charybdis of present day discrimination, there is another monster—equally horrendous, equally destructive, equally a barrier to Black progress. That monster is peonage or debt slavery as it was sometimes called.

Though the youngsters might not be familiar with it, the old-timers can easily remember this scourge that blighted—and to some extent continues to blight—the Black community. Today there are few of us in urban centers e.g. New York, Miami, Norfolk, Portland, Minneapolis, etc. who don't have relatives unfamiliar with this phenomenon.

What was peonage? In many ways, it did not differ from the system of sharecropping still in existence in the rural South. Though there are many variations of this system, for purposes here the system worked something like this: At the beginning of the planting season the rural Black would make an arrangement with the white landowner. The latter might provide the Black with some seeds, perhaps a plow and a mule, maybe a shack and some victuals. The Black in turn would raise crops. At the end of the season, an accounting would be made. Say, the crops grown were worth in value \$300; while the seeds, shack, etc. were valued at \$400. This would mean that a minimum the Black owned the landowner \$100. When the landowner forbade the Black to leave the plantation because of debt, sharecropping became peonage or debt slavery. For one can easily imagine that every year the Black would face a "deficit," and every year he would be forced to work the land for free. This was nothing more than a crudely disguised form of slavery.

The variations on this

cacophonous theme were many. Frequently, when weighing and valuing the crops raised, the landowner would understate their value by various fraudulent means. Why didn't the Black complain? Complain to who? Sometimes the landowner and the sheriff were the same person or old cronies or relatives. In no case, according to the creed of the Old South, would a white sheriff accept a Black cropper's word against a white landowner. In any event, complaining "uppity" Blacks were likely to receive a house call courtesy of the Ku Klux Klan and the courts, per usual, supported the status quo. For if the Black tried to run away, he could be jailed for "larceny by trick" or "fraud" and, like the fugitive slave laws of old, could be returned from his or her sanctuary "up-North" to face trial "down-South."

But if he did run away and got caught, the result was even more unpleasant. The landowner might pay his "\$2000 fine" and thus, the Black cropper would have to spend the rest of his life repaying this "debt." Or, the jailed Black cropper could get caught up in the notorious "convict lease system," which made peonage seem as cushy and comfortable as a Wall Street executive's post. Convicts would be "leased" by the state to work on the plantation of a big landowner who had made a sizeable contribution to the Democratic Party or was otherwise "in" with the "in crowd." Needless to say, whenever there was an insufficient number of convicts to lease, the sheriff would randomly arrest any Black on the streets or sitting on the porch for "vagrancy" or some other trumped-up charge and then send him to what the late Sam Cooke lamentably described as the "chain gang."

It was not unusual for an entire Black family to be "peons" or "debt slaves." The landowner construed the debt as not being personally owned by the Black male or female head of the family but by the entire family. Thus legal penalties would attach if any tried to escape. Hence, mere children could not go to school—assuming there were schools present—but forced to work from "sun-up to sun-down." The resultant illiteracy was the price they paid

and the scorn of many whites and some Blacks who, as a consequence, regarded and treated them as "ignorant." One is reminded of the wise words of the late playwright George Bernard Shaw, who commented that those who rule this country force Blacks to become bootblacks and then point to this status as proof of their inferiority.

How extensive was this system of "debt slavery?" Let us recall that over half of the Black population still resides in the South and that we did not become an urban people until World War II when the factories of the North and West needed factory laborers. Let us recall also that the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1939 declared "there are more Negroes held by these debt slaves than were actually owned as slaves before the War between the States." Let us recall as well that in 1954, the same year that *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided, the New York Times reported a case of a white landowner's paying the fines of jailed Blacks and then "forcing them to work them out in the fields." One of the Blacks who had been bailed out had later been beaten to death when he had attempted to flee.

Frankly, measuring the extensiveness of this system was not an easy task, since rural Blacks talking to reporters or researchers was not exactly smiled upon. But the leading academic study on debt slavery, Pete Daniel's *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South* (which, by the way, would make a better Christmas present than all the ties and stockings in Saks Fifth Avenue) acknowledges that even today this latter-day form of the "Black Death" has not been extinguished though its victims now include not only United States Blacks but Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Native Americans, and Caribbean Blacks.

Nonetheless, some might ask, "why discuss something that existed in its flourishing form years ago?" Well, it is discussed because some of the same Black laborers who are demanding affirmative action in the steel plants of Louisiana, the shipyards of Virginia and the auto plants of Michigan were "held back" and had their development retarded by a system like debt slavery. But for this system, they might not be toiling in

To Be Equal

Tale Of Two Decades

By VERNON E. JORDAN, JR.

The 1970s are over and the 1980s have begun. I suspect the predecade will be as different from its predecessor as the 1970s were from the 1960s.

The sixties ended with the nation enmeshed in a war in Vietnam, and exhibiting moral exhaustion derived from a decade of rapid social change. The domestic and international problems it tried to resolve proved more difficult than it imagined, and so the nation opted out of the struggle.

In doing so, it left those problems to hang over its head for ten long years, while economic and social changes during the decade worsened them.

The primary unresolved domestic issue was race. Racial disadvantage was attacked head-on in the sixties, with some phenomenal results. The system of legal segregation was dismantled, while blacks made great breakthroughs in almost all phases of life. But the engine of change stalled just when it should have powered an even greater thrust ahead.

The seventies were marked by a selfish privatism that placed personal concerns first and the common good a poor second. That mood was fed by resentment at minority gains, a sluggish economy that left a smaller pie to be divided, and runaway inflation that eroded purchasing power.

The social net result was that the nation's racial problems persisted and even deteriorated. Some blacks continued to progress in the seventies. Those with the re-

quisite educational credentials streamed into jobs formerly closed to minorities. The black college population rose sharply.

Small wonder that the seventies gave rise to the myth of black progress — the widespread belief that black gains were steady, even in the absence of a sustained national commitment to removing the last vestiges of discrimination.

But the truth about the seventies is that it was a decade of black losses.

Black income, over sixty per cent of white income in 1969, fell to only 57 per cent by the end of the decade. Black unemployment rose to two-and-a-half times the white rate by the decade's end. And more blacks were poor at the end of the seventies than at the beginning of the decade. The black middle class, painted by "experts" as growing, actually declined from twelve to nine per cent of all black families.

Where the sixties showed dramatic leaps in jobs, income, and other indicators of progress, the seventies showed a few gains buried in an overall picture of continued hardship.

What about the 1980s? With the country sliding into recession, with inflation unchecked, and with a continued national mood of selfishness, will they be more of the same?

My guess is that the pendulum will swing once more and that the coming decade will be characterized by a new thrust of social change.

Part of my optimism derives from the fact that serious problems cannot be allowed to linger indefinitely. We are rapidly reaching the point where the pent-up frustrations of racial and economic inequity will erupt into positive change.

A second reason is that without changes that make better use of the full human potential of all people, national productivity and the economy will decline. Thus it is in the national interest that social change be nurtured in the coming decade.

Those changes may also get impetus from the external events — intolerably high unemployment and inflation, another OPEC shock treatment, or a foreign crisis that spurs more intensive development of greater equity in America.

Finally, the eighties will be a decade of enormous changes in the way Americans work and live, and that always results in social changes. There will be an acceleration of the trend to a service economy, increasing the demand for educated workers and services that enhance human resources.

That kind of change must focus new attention on neglected minorities and on urban centers. The 1980s can be a better decade, but minorities must take the lead in fighting for change.

Just as the gains of the sixties were won by progressive alliances led by the civil rights movement, so too will the 1980s be a period of revived alliances for change.

Business In The Black

Poor Pay For Expensive Petroleum Imports
Nuclear Needs are Everyone's Needs

By Charles E. Belle

"The central thrust of the NAACP's policy statement was and is that the National Government must be made to lead in ensuring that the country develops abundant, affordable energy supplies that will promote vigorous economic growth," according to Mrs. Wilson. Furthermore, she claims the NAACP "stands firmly behind the statement."

It is estimated that the U.S. 1979 oil bill will be \$61 billion, about as much as all 25 million black Americans earned in 1976. "The energy crisis is real and will get worse," Margaret Bush Wilson, current Chairman of the NAACP testified before members of the Atomic Industrial Forum, Inc. (AIF) in San Francisco at its 1979 conference held at the St. Francis Hotel last month.

Making a major clarification of the controversial energy statement that was adopted in January 1978, by the NAACP, about any national energy policy that would restrict vigorous economic growth and thus reduce job opportunities for minorities, Mrs. Wilson provided a cogent comment.

Still it seems an almost silly position, unless one understands it is imperative that there be an integration of internal fuel resources to build a stronger and more stable U.S. energy resource. Coal and nuclear need to share 50-50 in providing energy for the future according to the AIF official.

No doubt, based on the country's abundant natural resource of coal and uranium from which Nuclear U-235 is produced. However, open for current debate on the surface at least, is the percentage of Nuclear vs. petroleum.

Putting left-wing political playmates aside for the moment and making a hard dollar determination, doing more nuclear makes sense if it was not for the long construction delays of nuclear reactor plants.

Roger Sherman, chairman of the Board, Ebasco Services, Incorporated and Chairman, AIF, just loves to repeat the success story of the Japanese in getting nuclear reactor power plants on line in record time. It will take too many years for the U.S. to catch up with its foreign competition in

nuclear reactor construction time under present prolonged bureaucratic restrictions.

Reminding about U.S. energy self-sufficiency is superfluous without refining our out-moded governmental licensing limitations. Japan just happens to cut two to four years off our construction time in past comparisons. Which by the way is currently in line with every other year big price hike by OPEC.

The current status of the U.S. commercial reactors indicate 72 with operating licenses and 91 with construction permits. Putting it bluntly, there are more than 125 per cent of order being held up than working to reduce oil imports gas price hikes and loss of U.S. jobs.

It's poor people, many blacks in the end who must pay for the expensive petroleum imported into this country. Common sense says nuclear use needs to be safe, even safer perhaps than in the past, but it is still needed to stem the tide of ever increasing cost of oil flowing from foreign soil.

If America spent \$61 billion on black Americans in 1979 there would be no race relations problems next year.

A Script For 1990?

By M. Carl Holman
President, National Urban Coalition

A few days before Christmas, a young staff member, whose work takes him into urban communities where elderly, poor and minority residents are being replaced by more affluent householders, dropped a discussion paper on my desk. In it he sketches out a version of what America's cities will be like by 1990. It is not a very pretty picture.

His script gives us an East Coast city in the year 1990, which is eighty per cent white — mainly middle and upper-middle class. The central business district has been revitalized

and the decaying suburban areas are now largely inhabited by former inner city residents.

The last black mayor was defeated in the mid-80's. Busing is no longer a significant public issue.

Delays in dealing with the nation's energy problems have already contributed to two recessions. There have been brownouts and severe fuel shortages, accompanied by riots. Air and water are considerably dirtier than in the 70s, but most citizens are more troubled by predictions of a worldwide depression.

Minority citizens, including refugees from other nations, are fighting desperately over the crumbs provided by government which is much less responsive to their needs than in earlier years...

A young man's end-of-year nightmare? Perhaps. But ask yourself. How many of those running for office — and how many of the rest of us — are really coming to grips with answers that will write a more positive script for the decade ahead?

Editor's Note: We received this greeting from Robert F. and Mrs. Mabel Williams in Baldwin, Michigan this week. We share its message of hope and faith with our readers. We're sure the Williams won't mind.

To Friends:
The old year casts off its cloak of gloom
As soothsayers speak of coming doom,
But we wish you well tho far or near
Dear friends, despite it all, have a good new year!

Civilization falters and kingdoms descend
As humanity advances to where it's been,
But hope is yet a promise, noble and supreme—
Dear friends, walk with faith and dare to dream!

There are rumblings here and rumblings there—
And words of discontent and bleak despair,
But keep the faith in all good cheer
Dear friends, despite it all, have a good new year!

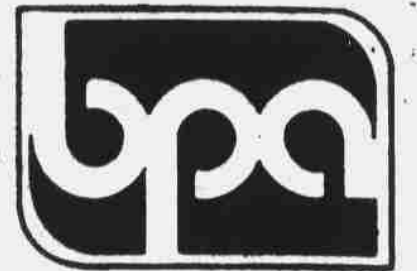
For years are like people, just transients passing through—
Ring out the old, and pay tribute to the new,
Tho the world abounds with chaos, hunger and fear—
Dear friends, despite it all, have a GOOD NEW YEAR!

these low-wage, cancer inducing positions but would have ascended higher. But for this system their parents would have money to buy them books or time to read them and, therefore, they would have gotten off to a

better start in life. But for this system, their cry for affirmative action might not be as pressing.

Hence, there present day demand for affirmative action is no more than simple justice and should be supported by all

right thinking people. In such a way we begin to repay a larger "debt" to our sisters and brothers who languished under the brutal lash of peonage and whose blood fertilized the soil making our growth possible.



BLACK PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

The Carolina Times
DURHAM, N.C.
(USPS 091-380)

L.E. AUSTIN
Editor-Publisher 1927-1971

Published every Thursday (dated Saturday) at Durham N.C. by United Publishers, Incorporated. Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3825, Durham, N.C. 27702. Office located at 923 Fayetteville Street, Durham, N.C. 27701. Second Class Postage paid at Durham North Carolina 27702. POSTMASTER: Send address change to THE CAROLINA TIMES, P.O. Box 3825, Durham, N.C. 27702.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: One year, \$12.00 (plus \$0.48 sales tax for North Carolina residents). Single copy \$3.00. Postal regulations REQUIRE advanced payment on subscriptions. Address all communications and make all checks and money orders payable to: THE CAROLINA TIMES.

NATIONAL ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE: Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., 45 West 45th Street, New York, New York 10006.

Member United Press International Photo Service, National Newspaper Publishers Association, North Carolina Black Publishers Association.

Opinions expressed by columnists in this newspaper do not necessarily represent the policy of this newspaper. This newspaper WILL NOT be responsible for the return of unsolicited pictures.