

commentary

Civil Rights Journal

Support National African American Museum

By Benjamin F. Chavis

Washington, D.C. is the city where national debates routinely occur on numerous serious and complex issues. The emerging debate on whether or not the United States should establish a National African American Museum in Washington, D.C. in proximity to or within the prestigious Smithsonian Institute merits our comment. There are some who take the position that there are more serious issues that deserve the attention of the African American community and the issue of a museum is not one of them.

We believe, however, that this is a very serious matter that should engender concern by all Americans, in particular African Americans. One of the things that perpetuates racist myths and stereotypes in the United States is the "institutionalized" denial of African American history and culture. In other words institutionalized racism has prevented most Americans from having opportunities to study and understand the African American experience.

We support the efforts of Congressman John Lewis, Democrat of Georgia, and Senator Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois, who have introduced legislation to establish the National African American Museum. Last year Congress passed legislation establishing a Smithsonian American Indian Museum. The most tragic, and therefore important aspect of American history, that is the histories of Native Americans and African Americans, have been hidden from the American people.

Ms. Claudine Brown, an African American professional with a distinguished career in museum education, is helping to gather data and public opinion on this issue. Ms. Brown told the New York Times: "Certainly our experiences here are very different from other Americans. Many people are appalled at the lack of progress that Native Americans and African Americans have had in terms of overcoming poverty. We are a group of people who have had laws made and enforced which have perpetuated our poverty, and we've spent lifetimes trying to change those laws. I think it is important that tourists who come from around the country and from abroad to this capital know about the unique experience that both these peoples have had."

The official name of the proposed institution is the National Museum of African American Heritage. Congressman Lewis, himself an historic personality of the African American struggle for freedom, stated, "We want to tell the whole story of the passage from the west coast of Africa, the system of slavery, the anti-slavery movement, to depict in Washington on the Mall the whole struggle — the sharecropper system, discrimination, segregation — bringing the story up to contemporary America. It would demonstrate the distance we have come as a democracy and the distance we still must travel."

No, a national museum will not solve the nation's racial problems. But, we know that such an institution will help a great deal to move this nation forward toward the truth of United States history. Therefore, let the word go out: the National Museum of African-American Heritage's time has come! Let your members of Congress know of your support for the Simon-Lewis legislation. Write to Ms. Claudine Brown at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. to register your support for the establishment of the National Museum of African-American Heritage on the Smithsonian Mall. This will help us to continue "to keep our eyes on the prize!"

Vantage Point

The KKK Should March On S&L Bandits

By Ron Daniels

Recently David Duke, the Klansman turned State Legislator from Louisiana, was successful in getting a bill passed which in effect banned affirmative action programs in the State of Louisiana. Meanwhile in Missouri City, Texas, that great American protector of white American rights, the Ku Klux Klan, was preparing to mount a series of marches and demonstrations to protest the alleged rape of a white woman by a black man.

But while David Duke and the KKK are laboring to protect white rights from a perceived enemy called black people, poor people, working people, the struggling middle class of all races and nationalities is being raped by whites in key positions of political and economic power. The Savings and Loan scandal is a case in point. While the David Dukes, Archie Bunkers, "Joe Sixpacks" and the KKK of America have been directing their anger at black people, white millionaires, politicians and regulators have been involved in the biggest rip-off in U.S. history.

More than 300 billion dollars has been squandered in the S&L scandal through fraud, theft and waste. The American people including Joe Sixpack will have to pay for the "S&L Bailout". When interest is factored in, the American people will be stuck with a 900 billion to 1 trillion dollar tab to be paid out of tax dollars over the next 30 years. Why isn't the KKK angry about that? Why isn't the KKK organizing to march on the S&L bandits?

Poor and working people, African Americans, other minorities and yes millions of white people will have to disproportionately bear the burden for the callous mismanagement, calculated deception and the outright thievery of rich white folks and their political cohorts and allies. The fact of the matter is the rich pay very little in taxes, so the little people will be the ones who are forced to pay the bill.

Ronald Reagan, the erstwhile hero of the rightwing, the conservatives, and Joe Sixpack, is principally responsible for creating the atmosphere which encouraged the HUD scandal, and the monstrous S&L rip-off. Reagan's policy of deregulation and lax enforcement of regulations was intended to enhance the riches of the wealthy. Joe Sixpack got a big dose of red, white and blue, love of country and patriotism and the notion that those lazy, shiftless, pushy/uppity blacks are what's dragging America down. The rich people in American could care less about this kind of nonsense. The rich people exploited the Reagan era to make more cash! Jesse Jackson characterized the Reagan policies as "reverse robinhood", robbing the poor to give to the rich. While Joe Sixpack was saluting the flag and keeping his eyes and anger focused on black people, a whole lot of wealthy white people had their hands in the till further enriching themselves.

The S&L rip-off will stymie the development of huge numbers of poor and working people for a considerable period of time. According to data cited in Newsweek Magazine (5/21/90), the enormity of the S&L scandal can best be illustrated in terms of what 250-300 billion dollars could purchase: "...EDUCATION - fully fund every existing government program from preschool through college - for the next four years; HEALTH CARE - provide universal insurance and long term care for the elderly and disabled for nearly four years... INFRASTRUCTURE overhaul the nation's water systems, repair all bridges and money left over to start fixing highways." The tax dollars spent on the S&L Bailout will also mean deferring allocations that could have been spent for education, housing, the environment and other social and economic programs.

The net effect of the S&L scandal on poor and working people is the loss of jobs, economic advancement and other opportunities for social uplift. Much of the tension which is behind the current outburst of overt



To Be Equal

Racism Still The Enemy

By John E. Jacyk
National Urban League

Racism is thrusting itself back into the nation's consciousness. For years we've been told that racism is no longer a force to be reckoned with, but African Americans have always known that it's alive and kicking. We know that, because we're the ones who have been kicked.

From mob attacks and racially-inspired murders in New York to violent outbursts on college campuses, reality is burying the myth that racial antagonisms are fading as fast as we want them to.

Alongside such well-publicized incidents are the insidious ways in which too many people ignore the importance of the issue and feel free to demonstrate racial insensitivity.

Just recently, for example, Arkansas voters in the Republican primary gave an alarming share of their votes to a former member of the American Nazi Party who was once an aide to former Klan leader David Duke, himself a candidate for the U.S. Senate in Louisiana.

Typical of the myopia that afflicts too many people who should know better when it comes to race, a Georgia state judge recently called the Ku Klux Klan a "persecuted group."

He said a state law restricting the group's right to wear masks restricted free speech.

That's an incredible ruling. The statute was enacted because the cowards in Klan sheets murdered and terrorized African Americans.

Now, we've got a state judge actually comparing these hate-mongers with their victims, ignoring the fact that behind the mask of the Klansmen is a terrorist.

Next, we're likely to see some judge saying it's unfair to stop the Klan's exercise of free speech if you ban the bombs they throw at churches.

Fortunately, the new racism has inspired a counter-trend of people banding together to proclaim their belief in racial unity and respect for differences.

In a New York torn by the media hype given inter-racial frictions, many people are reaching out across racial, ethnic and religious lines to strengthen their relationships.

Friction between African Americans and Korean store-owners have led to new efforts to help the groups understand each other better and to work together for a better community.

Another hopeful sign is the new federal law that gives the government better tools with which to track racially-inspired crimes and incidents.

It indicates a new seriousness at the federal level. And it's an essential first step to help put racism out of style and to combat the growth of extremist hate groups behind many of the incidents taking place around the country.

If it's any comfort — and it shouldn't be — racism isn't just an American phenomenon.

The end of communist dictatorships in eastern Europe has resulted in political freedom, but the downside of that is the emergence of nationalist and racist thinking that was prevalent in the pre-war years in those countries.

In other parts of the world too, we see a resurgence of inter-ethnic and inter-racial frictions. Just one example is the last-ditch attempt by die-hards to revive and strengthen apartheid and to sabotage a peaceful, biracial settlement of South Africa's future.

Racism is a disease we're all going to have to work hard to combat.

racism and racial violence is rooted in the intense competition for jobs and other kinds of opportunities. The S&L scandal is contributing to a combustible situation because rich white folks have squandered resources that could have been utilized to generate jobs and expand opportunities for social and economic advancement.

That's why I want David Duke, Joe Sixpack and the KKK to take to the streets for a cause that could really make a difference. The KKK should lead a "March on Washington" to protest the rip-off of the American people by—the S&L bandits. The KKK needs to take aim at some real enemies for a change.

It's an evil in any society, but especially in a democracy such as ours in which the measure of society's strength is its treatment of minorities.

And those among us who have been its targets must fight the battle both to erase racism as a factor in society and to fight its appearance wherever it shows itself, even among ourselves.

"ENVIRO-TAXES": AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAM

By Edwin Feulner

There's a new buzzword in Washington: "Enviro-Taxes." It means on companies and individuals that produce pollutants, and those who use non-renewable resources. The plan calls for taxing "fuel guzzling" automobiles as much as \$4,100 a year, sulfur emissions from factories at \$300 a ton, and for lumber companies to pay a hefty "severance" tax for harvesting old-growth trees.

Environmental activists and liberal lawmakers on Capitol Hill are pushing such taxes as the cure-all—at least in part—to the problems of environmental pollution and the federal deficit. Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, told the Christian Science Monitor that Enviro-Taxes could raise \$3.2 billion in the first year alone. He didn't say who will foot the bill.

Let's not pretend industry will pay the price. We will, as products become more expensive. And if U.S. products become even less competitive and manufacturers have to lay off workers, well—that's just the price we have to pay," say the environmental activists. Go tell that to an unemployed factory worker with a wife and four kids. How's that for the ultimate "down"?

Idealistic one-worlders may call their plan Enviro-Taxes, but a better name would be "Enviro-Scam." First, because it's not a new idea. Second, because it won't work.

We've spent hundreds of billions of dollars in the last 20 years cleaning up the environment, yet environmental activists keep telling us things are getting worse. Each year it's the same story all over again: We need more regulations, more penalties or the world is going to self-destruct. If they had their way, we'd all be eating seaweed and running around in rickshaws.

What is really needed—at our universities and on Capitol Hill—is a basic understanding of how the laws of nature and economics interrelate. Simply put, if you tax pollution the incentive is to pollute up to a maximum—no more, no less. By using a "market" approach, however, you can make it profitable for companies to pollute less than the maximum allowed by law.

One approach, known as the "clean credit" program, is being tested successfully in a number of localities around the country. Factories that pollute less than the government allows get "clean credits." These credits can then be sold to "dirty" factories. For example, if a factory emits only 50 units of pollution, it gets a credit for the other 50 and is allowed to sell part of its credits to a factory that emits 100 units of pollution. The result, however, is a net reduction in pollution.

In this way the forces of supply and demand, profit and loss work to clean up the environment.

Another example: Annual emissions of lead into the air—due to lead-treated gasoline—have dropped 94 percent since 1982. Since then the government has required refineries to sharply reduce production of leaded fuels. Some refineries could easily switch to kerosene production of unleaded gasoline; many could not. So the government gave each refinery a set of credits to produce a set, but reduced, amount of leaded fuel. The owners had to decide whether it was in their best interests to halt the production of leaded gas and sell their rights, or to continue leaded gas production and buy one else's credits. The result: a 94 percent reduction in lead emissions, saving the economy. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates the program already has saved \$200 million, compared to shutting all the gasoline refineries down at one time.

Other examples abound. The simple truth is: Free market forces are the most acceptable way to clean up our environment, preserve our resources, and revitalize our economy.

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