

Commentary

Civil Rights Journal

A Call To Realize The Dream

By Bernice Powell Jackson

I sometimes refer to myself as a Brown vs Board of Education baby, to remind myself of the changes I have seen in my lifetime. Growing up in the Nation's Capital, I was scheduled to attend one of the segregated kindergartens of that city. But during the summer before school began, the Brown decision changed all of that. Those of us over the age of 30 are intensely aware of the changes we have seen in our lifetime. We know first-hand what the segregated world was like. We remember what it felt like not to be able to stop at a restaurant or a rest room on a long automobile trip. We know what it meant not to be able to get any job we wanted, despite our education or background. We remember when there was no Congressional Black Caucus, when no major cities had African American mayors, indeed when many African Americans were denied the right even to vote.

But for young people that world is history. It is difficult for many of them to understand the emotional and physical toll that living in that world took on African Americans. It is hard for them to imagine what it felt like not to be hired for a job or to be paid at a lower wage. They cannot understand easily the significance of the historically black colleges which were the only higher education option for most. They cannot imagine what it was like not being able to try on clothes you wanted to purchase or not being able to get a cool drink of water on a hot day.

This is the real significance of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. It is time for remembering and for sharing that memory with our young people and our children. In order for them not to take for granted living wherever they want, attending whatever school they have the ability and funds to attend or working at whatever job they are qualified for, they must understand their not-so-distant history. If they are to understand the importance of voting, they must understand what it was like when we couldn't.

But the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday must be more than memories. It must become a time of reeducation and revisioning, because the times we are living in are more dangerous to our survival than any time since we arrived unwillingly on these shores. Our children are killing each other. Our men and women, our babies are dying of AIDS. Children ten and eleven years old are planning their funerals. Children are having children. Mothers, hooked on crack, are abandoning their babies. Fathers have given up any hope of jobs in their lifetime. Our ancestors, who survived the Middle Passage, who survived the horrors of slavery, who survived lynchings and Jim Crow laws, cry out to us. Martin Luther King, Jr., the champion of peace, cries out to us.

We in the Commission for Racial Justice use this occasion, after more than a quarter-century of work, to rededicate ourselves to continuing the struggle for racial justice in this country and the world. My predecessors, Dr. Charles E. Cobb, Sr. and Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. have left a rich legacy for me as I take over the helm of the Commission and for our staff as we begin our new journey together. We thank them for that.

We rededicate ourselves to work tirelessly to help end the violence which is destroying our communities. We say enough. We say enough of the violence which is killing innocent children, which is destroying a generation of our young men. We want to find ways to enable churches and community organizations to take back our children, to steal from death's grasp and to give them life and hope — hope for a future which includes them, hope for the world which Martin Luther King, Jr. dared to dream.

We rededicate ourselves to work tirelessly around rebuilding the health and wellness of our communities. Our health care needs parallel those of undeveloped countries. If our young men survive the violence, they face higher mortality rates in adulthood. We face higher incidences of cancer, heart disease, hypertension, alcoholism and drug addiction. Our babies are more likely to die. AIDS is rampaging through our communities. Toxic wastes continue to be dumped on our communities and we are unhealthy from living next to these deadly chemicals. The Commission for Racial Justice will work harder than ever on health and wellness issues.

As we celebrate the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., we in the Commission for Racial Justice rededicate ourselves. And we ask you to join with us in the struggle. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks would demand no less.

To Be Equal

Where Will the Jobs Come From in '94

By John E. Jacob

In 1994, as in past years, the big question is: where are the jobs? The recession is long over, at least according to the experts who keep the statistics. But for most of the working population the recession still rages.

The December unemployment rate was well over six percent, and it is really higher than that, since the method used to count the jobless vastly understates unemployment in our economy.

If you count as unemployed those who want to work but have given up trying to find jobs or can only find part-time jobs, the true unemployment rate is closer to double the official rate.

And unemployment among African Americans is over double the white rate, and has been for as long as anyone can remember.

The economy's inability to generate decent jobs for all is at the root of many of our most pressing problems.

The lack of job opportunities is behind the crime problem. It accounts for our urban problems, since the loss of manufacturing jobs and tax revenues forces cities to the wall. And it is the underlying cause of a host of other national problems, from rising poverty to family breakup.

Will 1994 be a better year for jobs? Maybe, but the evidence thus far doesn't give much ground for optimism.

In the last two months, several major corporations announced plans for massive layoffs and plant closings. And a poll of employers found that almost half of the companies polled cut their payrolls by an average of ten percent last year, while a fourth expect to do the same this year.

For all the publicity given to white-collar layoffs, it is blue collar workers who are most vulnerable to unemployment.

The Labor Department says managers and professionals — who make up only 27 percent of the total labor force — got more than 60 percent of the new jobs created over the past year. Many of the remaining new jobs were temporary.

National leadership has to make job creation a top priority. Congress especially, has to temper its concern about the budget deficit with some serious action to close the job deficit.

It needs to move on two fronts.

One is short-term job creation, focused on the people most vulnerable to layoffs. That can be done by an infrastructure rebuilding program that can quickly train and employ today's low-skilled jobless.

The second front is long-term measures in education and training that prepare people to hold the higher-skill jobs that modern economy needs.



Along The Color Line

Fascism In Europe: The International Dimensions of Racism

By Manning Marable

I stood on a Paris street last month, as darkening clouds rumbled above. Beneath intermittent showers, marching in crude military formation, were several hundred members of the French racist political party, the National Front. Most of the party members were wearing casual work clothes, blue jeans and worn leather jackets. The majority of demonstrators appeared to be in their twenties and thirties. All were shouting, and all were white.

I followed the motley procession as it made its way from the Boulevard Raspail, though the business district of the narrow Rue De Rennes, on the city's Left Bank. National Front members and their supporters were busy posting racist flyers on the walls of dozens of buildings and doorways. One poster attacked French participation in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT] negotiations, which were just being concluded in Geneva, Switzerland. Another flyer condemned symbols of "American imperialism" which supposedly undermined French culture. The symbols included the Statue of Liberty — which had been made in France originally and given to America as a gift — the trademark of McDonald's hamburger chain, and a gross depiction of an African American basketball player, with huge lips and grotesque eyes. The National Front's slogans were provocative: "France for the French!" "Immigrants Out of Europe!"

The demonstration blocked an intersection, trapping a small automobile. Eventually, the driver made the mistake of showing his outrage at the fascists. National Front members surrounded the vehicle and pounded it furiously with their feet and fists. The motorist fled for safety, as his automobile was smashed. As the panic in the streets escalated, I wondered aloud, "Where are the French police?"

Saturday afternoon shoppers who had come to the busy district for Christmas shopping no huddled anxiously against the walls of the brightly decorated buildings. One elderly woman with red hair, perhaps a survivor of the German occupation of France a half century ago, was not intimidated. Stepping forward, she bitterly denounced the young thugs: "Fascists!" "Fascists!"

When the demonstrators reached a McDonald's restaurant, they began to shout in unison, pounding against the large glass windows and doors. Terrified patrons and employees fled. Then from the rear of the mob, about twenty "skinheads" covering their faces with red handkerchiefs sprinted forward. They smashed a large plate glass window in the front of the restaurant, as well as the front doors. Triumphant and cheering, the National Front members marched to the Tour Montparnasse, thrusting their rain-soaked racist banners into the dark sky. Once more, the police were nowhere to be found.

The neofascist National Front has tens of thousands of members and has garnered the support of several million French citizens. The Front appeals chiefly to the country's unemployed and working class white, who feel that they are losing their jobs to nonwhite immigrants. By purging Arabs, Africans and others lacking French citizenship from the country, the Front declares, poor whites will advance economically.

Given the changes in technology and the global economy, many of the low-skill manufacturing jobs are lost forever. They can be done cheaper by machines or by low-wage areas overseas.

Many people think it's good to lose those jobs because they'll be replaced by better ones. But the people who lose low-skill jobs don't have the skills to get the better ones — programming a computer is different from operating a lathe or a sewing machine and it is dishonest to pretend otherwise.

That's why it is necessary to have a two-tier jobs policy. While we train and educate people for the jobs of tomorrow, we still have to find ways for people to work today.

Since those most vulnerable to unemployment are unskilled, we need to create jobs with minimal skills, and include training components that enable people to advance to higher skill jobs.

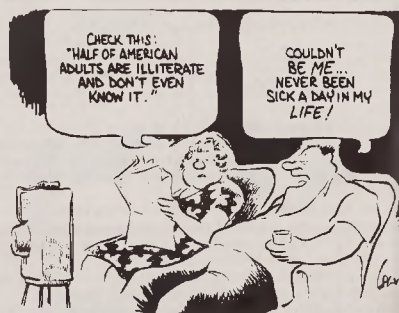
The Administration is addressing those problems, but Congress and the public are still indifferent to the vast human suffering involved, and to unemployment's enormous drain on America's economy and its social system.

Fascist, anti-Semitic and racist movements are growing rapidly in Europe in the post-Cold War period. In the past three years, right extremists in Germany have murdered thirty nonwhites, and have taken the homes of Turkish and African workers. In Russia's recent parliamentary elections, the racist and ultranationalist party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy received significant support. In Italy, the granddaugher of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, running on a reactionary program, only narrowly defeated in her bid for mayor of the city of Naples.

The near political outlook in Europe is more dangerous today than at any time since the defeat of Hitler's fascism fifty years ago. The real wages of white workers fall and unemployment grows, the conditions for scapegoat politics and ethnic chauvinism increase. We must monitor closely the growth of parties like the National Front, a party support whenever possible to progressive and anti-racist organizations throughout Europe. As Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois and Malcolm X all observed, the struggle against racism must be waged internationally.

As I walked toward my hotel after the National Front's rally, I countered one final poster, the most vicious of all. A white man shown under violent assault, with two black hands covering his face from behind. The slogan beneath read simply: "Freedom of Expression for White!"

Dr. Manning Marable is professor of history and political science, director of the African American Studies Institute, Columbia University, New York City. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 250 publications and 75 radio stations internationally.



Words of Wisdom

Forgetting is easier once forgiveness has been offered.

The best way to learn about a subject is to try to teach it.

Praise is best given behind one's back rather than to one's face.

Look at adversity as a training process for greater things.

Uninvited guests are like fish; after three days, neither are welcome in your house.

A resolution made in haste is a resolution already broken.

Exaggeration is first cousin to a lie.

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