

# commentary

## Vantage Point

### Women of Haiti Still Cry Out for Justice

By Ron Daniels

I recently returned from Haiti deeply disturbed by the lack of justice for thousands of Haitian women who were victims of violence under the coup regime that toppled President Jean Bertrand Aristide in 1991. Unfortunately, nearly four years after the restoration of President Aristide and the rebirth of democracy in Haiti, few of the perpetrators of the reign of terror that resulted in the murder of thousands of Haitians have been brought to justice for their crimes.

The untold story of this unspeakable reign of terror, directed by Cedras, Biamby and Francois and carried out by their principal hit-man Emmanuel "Toto" Constant (who was also on the payroll of the CIA), is that Haitian women bore much of the brunt of the assault. The international community has come to know of the tragic/heroic story of Alerte Belance, a Haitian militant in the Lavalas Movement, who was hacked and dismembered, by a machete wielding squad of Constant's henchmen and left for dead in a killing field outside of Port au Prince. Miraculously Ms. Belance, whose husband managed to escape the attackers, lived to tell her story. She has become a valiant voice for women victims of violence. However, there are thousands of other cases which are simply unknown to the international community/public.

An organization called MAP VIV, one of the agencies in Haiti struggling to offer supportive services to women victims of violence under the coup. Our delegation was moved to tears as we visited this agency and heard women tell their stories first hand. Without exception the women we spoke with had been supporters or sympathizers of President Aristide and the Lavalas Movement. Some of them had been vendors, shop keepers and small business owners. Because they dared to dream of democracy in Haiti and had the courage to stand up and fight for the return of the embodiment of their dream in the person of Aristide, they logs everything, we heard horrific story after story of women being unmercifully beaten, tortured, raped, and shot. Some are now rearing children who are the offspring of their violent violation by rape.

Most of these women are now penniless and homeless, living day to day having little other than MAP VIV, each other and their undying hope for justice to sustain them. Yet these courageous women of Haiti have not lost their dignity. They have plans for a new future. To ease their pain, the women created a play which tells the story of the violence and terror they suffered under the coup. The play is therapeutic because it provides an outlet for the pent up anger, frustration and self doubts that often accompany the trauma of this kind of violence.

The women also have another idea for the play. They want to use it, not only to tell the world their story and to build support for their demand that justice be done, these remarkable women of Haiti also want to use the proceeds from the play as seed money for a cooperative economic venture. They want to continue to work collectively, using the economic venture to give themselves a new start in life.

The women made one simple request of our delegation. They asked us to bring them to the United States so that they could perform their play, tell their stories and let the world know that the women of Haiti are still crying out for justice. The women also see the premier of their play in the U.S. as a means to raise the seed money needed to launch their cooperative economic venture.

During a previous delegation to Haiti, as an act of faith, I pledged that somehow we would assist our Haitian sisters to fulfill their wish of coming to the U.S. This nation has historically been responsible for much of the suffering in Haiti, including being in complicity with the 1991 coup, so it is appropriate that these victims from among the Haitian masses come to the prime citadel of their oppression to speak truth to power.

Upon my return on this delegation, I was able to inform the women that we were not just coming to hear their anguish and pain, we bore good news! The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), the New York based civil rights/human rights, public interest legal organization where I serve as Executive Director, has agreed to bring a delegation from MAP VIV to the U.S. for a tour to enable them to perform their play. Plans are now in progress for the tour to take place in the Fall of this year.

In addition to the play, we envision the women of MAP VIV meeting with members of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Progressive Caucus, civil rights organizations, Haiti Solidarity organizations and grassroots advocacy groups. Hopefully these face to face meetings with victims of violence under the coup will increase the pressure on the U.S. government to do much more to aid the Haitian people in their struggle for justice. CCR is committed to seeing that the women of Haiti have their day before the court of public opinion in the U.S. as they continue their courageous fight for justice too long denied.

## To Be Equal

### Taking Care of Business

By Myron F. Robinson

President, The Urban League of Greater Cleveland

(Guest Columnist)

Preparing Black America for economic independence is serious business. It's serious business because African Americans, like all other peoples here and abroad, face a significant challenge: We must equip ourselves, as individuals and as a group, to do well in the new globally-oriented free-market economy.

That new environment is full of opportunity — as America's booming economy bears eloquent witness to.

But it can also be very harsh and unforgiving, as the severe economic turmoil roiling Indonesia, and, less dramatically, South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, and even Japan indicate.

The point is that the "good times" can turn sour very fast, even for economies and peoples seemingly suitably equipped to do well.

As a group, African Americans are not yet as "suitably equipped" as we need to be for the new age. We are not involved enough in business; as a result, we are especially economically vulnerable.

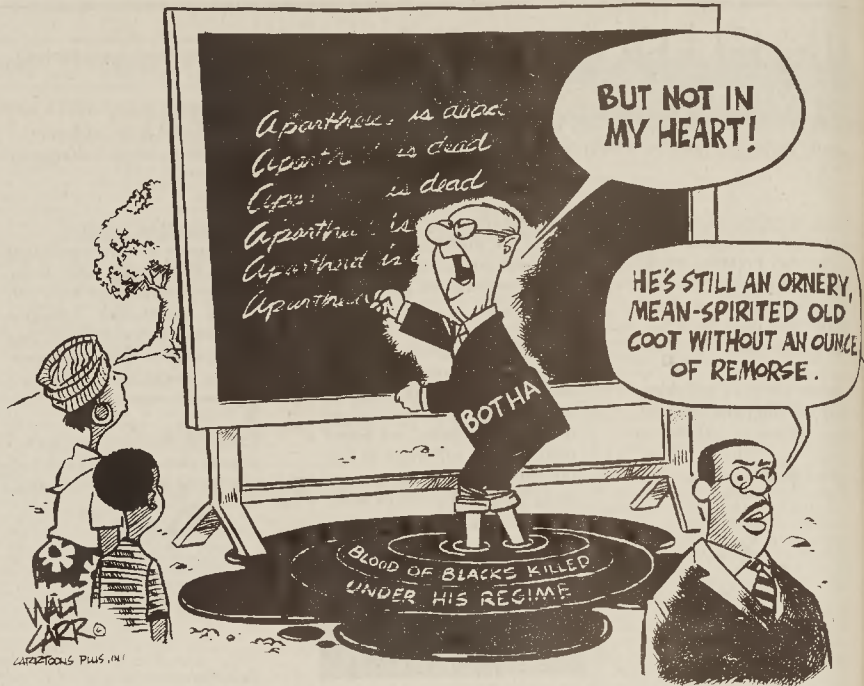
For example, African Americans own less than 4 percent of all businesses in the United States; two-thirds of African Americans invest none of their income; and the black middle class — the group which must be the economic backbone of blacks as a class — is so bereft of assets that the loss of their next two paychecks would cast many into a precarious financial situation.

To be sure, we're making progress. African Americans are being pushed and pulled along the road of upward mobility by a growing cohort of superbly skilled businessmen and women in many fields of endeavor, by young people who realize they can build a future out of striving for excellence — and by the "open doors" the civil rights movement of the 1960s and affirmative action made possible.

But we need to expand that cohort as fast as possible.

Why? For one thing black-owned firms are much more likely to hire inner-city residents for the jobs they're qualified to train for and do. For another, economic power provides the resources for exercising political clout at the local, state and national level. For a third, economic power

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## Carolina Beat

### Wicker's Wacky Tuition Plan

By Andrew Cline and Michael Lowrey

RALEIGH — Few indeed are the proposals as dramatic as that made recently by Lt. Gov. Dennis Wicker: Eliminate community-college tuition for full-time students who graduate from North Carolina high schools after 1998. And few are the proposals as bad. Wicker's idea is possibly the least thought out, least fair, most counterproductive, and most economically wasteful to emerge from Raleigh in the last decade.

For starters, tuition is not, by and large, keeping people from attending the state's community colleges (One in six North Carolina adults already attends a state community college). A semester's tuition for in-state students is only \$280. Starting this year, federal tax credits of up to \$1,500 a year will be offered for a student's first two years of college. In addition, numerous grants and loans, including federal Pell Grants, are available for students who can demonstrate economic need. Wicker's proposal simply does not address a real need; costs are not driving potential students away from the community college system.

Not only does Wicker's plan tilt at windmills, but like Quixote, Wicker's fantasy would create additional problems. Low tuition rates that allow students to drop classes without forgoing much money already have created a high dropout rate at N.C. community colleges. If students were to put forth none of their own dollars for tuition, this problem would worsen.

Furthermore, Wicker wants to provide 100 percent state-funded tuition — it's subsidized, not "free" — but not for every one. Only full-time students who move directly from high school into the community college system would qualify. Thus, Wicker's plan would encourage those students who otherwise would attend part-time to enroll full-time, not attend the extra classes, and stick us with the tab. And what about those students who want or need to work between graduating high school and attending college? Wicker leaves them in the lurch.

Also, Wicker's estimate of his plan's total cost is short by about \$10 million a year because he calculated only the cost of tuition, not the full cost of educating a community college student. The real cost likely would be more than \$22 million per year, not the \$12 million that he estimated.

Again, Wicker chases ghosts while allowing a real evil to reap a populace. Announcing his plan, Wicker reasoned that 12 years of schooling were not enough to produce an adequately educated person and two additional years were therefore needed. He was both right and wrong. North Carolina students are woefully undereducated after 12 years in the public school system, but the problem does not stem from too few years of schooling. Rather, those 12 years contain too little education. The issue isn't time, but productivity.

N.C. State University economist Michael Walden studied educational inputs among industrialized nations and found that American students spent more time in school than students in every other industrial country save the Netherlands. American per-pupil spending was among the highest in the world. Yet, despite these high inputs, U.S. students continued to score poorly on international tests. The reason, Walden wrote, was that classroom time is not used as productively as it is in other nations.

American schools teach more subjects and have shorter class periods than schools in other countries. As a result, American students spend less time on their core academic subjects than do their counterparts in other nations. "[High school students in Japan, France and Germany] spend more than double the amount of instructional time in core academic subjects than do American students," Walden found. This is true, though American students spend more time in school.

What is true of the U.S. in general is true of North Carolina. In the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress tests, North Carolina students performed horribly. In reading (tested in the 4th grade only), 26 percent of North Carolina students were proficient. In math (tested in the 4th and 8th grades), only 21 percent of our 4th graders and 20 percent of our 8th graders were proficient.

Wicker's proposal would spend millions of dollars to run tens of thousands of undereducated students through two additional years of North Carolina public education. It should be obvious to any observer that this solution. To achieve the goals that Wicker wants, the best method would be to improve productivity within the K-12 system, not to try to bring it at one end.

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## Civil Rights Journal

### The Emperor's New Clothes: After Welfare Reform

By Bernice Powell Jackson

U.C.C. Commission for Racial Justice

Remember the story of the Emperor's New Clothes? Only one brave soul was unafraid to tell the Emperor that he was naked, as I remember it. Everyone else pretended that the Emperor was fully clothed. Well, while government officials are telling us that so-called Welfare Reform has been successful, the reality is that they really don't know what has happened to tens of thousands of persons no longer on welfare rolls. The reality is that many who are working with the poor are telling us that the poor are now poorer and that while welfare reform may succeed in ending welfare as we know it, it is not ending poverty as we know it. They are telling us that the Emperor has on no clothes.

Well over a million cases have been dropped from the nation's welfare rolls. But statistics from the U.S. General Accounting Office seem to indicate that the majority of the families whose benefits were terminated did not find work. The problem is there are just too many unskilled, untrained, poorly educated workers and too few jobs to match.

Take Wisconsin for instance, the state which has often been held up as the model for welfare reform. A study done by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee found that only 34 percent of those dropped from welfare rolls found full-time jobs. Only one in six of the families cut off was now above the poverty line. In addition, people on welfare are required to drop out of education or training programs and take the first

available job. That requirement ensures that these people will be poor, whether on welfare or not.

Or take Massachusetts. One advocate for the poor who has worked with the poor and homeless for over ten years points to the reality that the overwhelming majority of the parents in the families she works with have no high school diploma and little to offer in terms of job skills or marketable skills. These women have no chance of competing in today's job market, but the state expects them to become completely self-sufficient without any training or assistance," she said, adding since the state is not providing job training for these women, the limits are going to expire at the end of 1998 and these families will be nothing to fall back on.

Unfortunately, many Americans believe that the problems of families have gone away with the welfare rolls. Many Americans mistakenly believe that job training or preparation has occurred. It usually has not. Some are merely given pep-talks by their case workers or assigned to a brief "job preparation seminar" which tells them to dress, and how to speak on the phone and then puts them at a desk with a telephone and a newspaper to try to get job interviews. Wisconsin Senator Gwendolynne Moore calls the pretense of job readiness "the 'You Go, Girl' category."

Many Americans believe that all these folks formerly on welfare have real jobs -- that they just needed that extra push to get out of the market. But look at workfare, the program by which welfare recipients are required to work to continue to receive their benefits. It sounds like a good idea on the surface -- working for your welfare check. But with Justice, a national coalition of organizations, warns that workfare participants have proven to be an irresistible, cheap labor force for failing city services. In New York City, for instance, workfare participants have been cleaning subways and buses as well as doing other low-paid city workers, but with even lower salaries and fewer benefits.

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