

On pinning the rap on black people

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. is the executive director of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BENJAMIN CHAVIS

NEW YORK -- North Carolina is at it again.

Back in 1968 the state sentenced 16-year-old Marie Hill to the gas chamber. Then in 1974 the state charged Joanne Little, for the murder of the jailer who tried to rape her.

Now North Carolina is attempting to victimize yet another black woman. Her name is Jacqueline Barbee-Bullock, and she is the mother of five children. She is also serving a 15-year prison sentence for alleged arson.

Here are the facts of the case: On Friday, Nov. 9, 1984, a contractor began fixing the roof of Mrs. Barbee-Bullock's home, under orders from the Housing Authority. Her landlord was then a lieutenant in the Public Safety Department, the combined police and fire department in Durham.

He owns a number of properties in the area.

The next day, Saturday, it rained and the water from the still-to-be-repaired roof began to leak onto the electrical wiring. Mrs. Barbee-Bullock, frightened for the safety of her children, called the fire department. Fire department inspectors issued a citation and ordered her to vacate because of the imminent danger. She and her family then went to a local hotel.

On Monday, Nov. 12, 1984, at 11:15 in the morning, Mrs. Barbee-Bullock's house, along with other adjoining homes, burned to the ground. One hour later -- even before any evidence was gathered in the case -- Mrs. Barbee-Bullock was arrested for arson.

On May 30, 1985, she was convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison. She was convicted by a

jury of 11 whites and one black. This in a city which is close to being 50-percent black.

More than 20 people saw her downtown the morning of the fire, but only two of these witnesses were called to the stand by her court-appointed lawyer. Also, her lawyer never made a point of the fact that the house had been cited for violations just two days before the fire.

These are the primary facts of the case. But there are a couple of other things you should know.

First, Mrs. Barbee-Bullock's landlord received the insurance money from the fire. He has now rebuilt the house and other adjoining houses which were also destroyed in the fire. He thus conformed to the housing regulations without spending any of his own money.

And one last thing: Mrs. Barbee-Bullock is an accomplish-



ed artist. Not only her household possessions, but all her artwork as well, went up in flames that morning. Yet, rather than holding the landlord accountable for the fire, they have tried to use Mrs. Barbee-Bullock as the scapegoat.

As it has historically done, North Carolina is again blaming the victim for the victimization. And the state is again assuming that because she is black -- and also poor -- she is guilty until pro-

ven innocent.

This is not just a local problem, though. The railroading of black women into jail is a national disgrace. Black women represent less than 12 percent of the adult female population of the United States. Yet they make up more than 50 percent of the women in prison.

There is, however, one striking difference in the case of Mrs. Barbee-Bullock: She has decided to fight back. Though black and

poor and with all the cards stacked against her, she continues to resist. As she has said, "They can't make me submit to this injustice. I'm fighting for more than myself: I'm fighting for my kids, too."

Mrs. Barbee-Bullock should not have to fight alone. All those who seek justice should stand behind her and the many others who are now in prison not because they're guilty, but because they're black.

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Payne

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allow his client, Cedric Sandiford, to testify until Blum is indicted as a willing participant in the lynch mob.

In his stubbornness on this point, Maddox appears to be needlessly overreaching the facts. He should back away from his client's judgement and, perhaps, his own early instincts, and press the case for faulty police judgment and Blum's indictment based on his actions at the death scene.

Sandiford's refusal to testify has led to second-degree murder charges being thrown out against three white teen-agers arrested for their role in the mob beating. The firmer ground under the refusal is Maddox's insistence that District Attorney John J. Santucci should have followed the normal procedure of presenting eyewitnesses -- already harassed with death threats -- to a grand jury instead of a public preliminary hearing.

As this violent and complex case unfolds, like the Goetz case, it is marked by a chilling public pursuit not of the true villains but of the victims and their attorneys. At the core of this flimflam is the quixotic Mayor Ed Koch, who last year was revealed as presiding over a kleptocracy.

Eager to ride another media issue to renewed popularity, Koch, with pre-emptive rhetoric, early on called the incident a

"lynching." He offended some Southern politicians by declaring: "I'd expect this type of thing to happen in the Deep South."

There are few politicians more adept than the cunning Koch at sprinting like a drum major to the front of the parade and heading it off in another direction.

In the Goetz case, Koch first attacked the subway shooting but, sensing the prevailing winds, defended the gunman. With the corruption scandal, Hizzoner dashed to the bedside of chief thief Donald Manes, only to turn like a piranha on his good friend "Donny."

In the Griffith lynching case, Koch, with an eye on black voters, first denounced the act. More recently, with an eye on a broader base, he incredibly denounced Sandiford's refusal to testify as "worse than the lynching."

Clearly, here remains a demagogue, without principle or sense, whose singular preoccupation seems to be to stay on the stage.

While manipulating a few misguided, so-called black leaders, Koch's exploitation of the Griffith "lynching" has been that of a man who yells, "Fire!" in a crowded theater because he intends to steal the popcorn.

Les Payne is an assistant managing editor at Newsday.

New York City: Racism in America's melting pot

Rick Hampson writes for The Associated Press.

GUEST COLUMN

By RICK HAMPSON

NEW YORK -- The original melting pot is also a city where race is an obsession, where black progress as well as black failure seems to increase racial tension, where racial violence periodically rends the social fabric and sullies the civic image.

"New York is one of the most sophisticated and international of cities, but it is peopled from enclaves that are more tribal than many small towns," says Jacqueline Wexler, president of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

The enclaves are white and black, and despite the presence of dozens of other racial and ethnic groups, "racism" in New York still suggests one overriding prejudice: that of whites against blacks.

The underside of the nation's pluralist showcase was manifest last month when three blacks were attacked by a gang of whites as they walked through the largely white Queens neighborhood of Howard Beach.

But there is no evidence that New York is more racist than any other large American city, or more racist than it was last year or 20 years ago. And recently there again were signs that New York, which stayed relatively cool when other cities burned in the 1960s, still knows how to cope with racial tension.

Asked what is unique about racism in New York, Eleanor Holmes Norton, former director of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission,

responds; "Scale."

New York has more whites and blacks than any other city, and an environment more vulnerable to, yet more likely to exacerbate, their mutual suspicions.

According to the 1980 census, about 52 percent of New York's population of 7 million was white, with 24 percent black and 20 percent Hispanic.

Since then, some demographers say, the white population probably has slipped below 50 percent for the first time in the city's history.

If there is anything special about race in New York, it is the size of one part of the black population -- the black underclass, whose plight is both cause of and product of white racism.

Underclass New Yorkers, says Mrs. Norton, "are probably the most desperately poor black peo-

ple in the United States."

Unemployed, uneducated, unorganized and unruly, most are clustered in ghettos in Manhattan, the Bronx and Brooklyn.

Pathetic yet threatening, the black underclass is the catalyst of much white racism, according to Andrew Hacker, a Queens College political scientist and author of "The New Yorkers." But socioeconomics does not explain why whites and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, with lower employment and education levels than blacks, seem to get along better.

"It's just that blacks are different," Hacker suggests. "They are black, they came here from Africa, and they didn't come voluntarily."

Much of New York's white racism seems to spring from the middle- and lower-middle-class. Please see page A9

Marable

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vative white middle class won't support the Democratic Party in presidential elections."

Jackson remains the most popular leader of black Americans -- and one of the few politicians who has the potential to unite millions of minorities, feminists, working people and the poor under an umbrella of progressive social policies. However, Jackson has not been able to transfer his personal popularity to several local candidates who agree with his basic program of social justice.

Last year in North Carolina, for example, Jackson endorsed black candidate Theodore Kinney in the Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate. Despite Jackson's 25-percent total in the 1984 North Carolina Democratic primary vote, Kinney got less than 5 percent.

In Georgia, in Savannah's mayoral election, Jackson's candidate was former city Alderman Roy Jackson. Although blacks comprise almost half of the city's voting-age population, incumbent Mayor John Rousakis defeated Roy Jackson by a two-to-one margin.

One of the most highly publicized political defeats for the Rainbow last year occurred in New Jersey's 10th Congressional District. Jackson had received 70 percent of the district's vote in the 1984 presidential primary. Although the district was represented in Congress by veteran liberal Peter Rodino, many constituents felt that the time had arrived for a black liberal to replace him. Announc-

ing his candidacy just before the 1986 primary, Donald Payne, a two-term Newark City Council member and a former president of the national YMCA, represented a black liberal alternative.

The local and national media deliberately distorted this campaign as a black-versus-white contest and used Jackson's endorsement of Payne as evidence in its "Jesse-bashing" campaign.

The New York Times editorialized: "Mr. Jackson felt compelled to take out after (Rodino), using Mr. Payne as a racial prop... Mr. Jackson seems incapable of looking at anything except race." Other newspapers jumped on the "Jesse-bashing bandwagon."

Although Payne was defeated by Rodino, this cannot be blamed on Jackson's participation in this campaign.

Payne entered the primary late, less than one month before the election. He spent only \$25,000, as opposed to \$175,000 spent by the incumbent. Moreover, Rodino also had the support of many members of the Congressional Black Caucus.

But the net outcome was the perception that Jackson was a "racist" -- and that the Rainbow had lost its influence.

On the positive side, the Rainbow Coalition continues to grow at the grassroots level, and Jackson has remained at the forefront of progressive struggles.

As of last November, the National Rainbow Coalition had more than 20,000 paid-up

members, and chapters now exist in 40 states. Jackson has traveled to South Carolina to help promote the struggle against racist harassment and discrimination at The Citadel.

Last fall, when Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone publicly criticized the "low level" of intelligence of blacks and Hispanics, most politicians tried to skirt this issue. Instead, Jackson flew to Japan and challenged the "Japanese companies for their total insensitivity to the legitimate business quests" of minorities and women.

Unlike many black politicians, who have said little about the Iran-Contra arms scandal, Jackson has repeatedly attacked Reagan and his administration's actions as "illegal" and "immoral."

Jackson's Operation PUSH has also continued to make headway on the economic front. In mid-December, PUSH signed a \$1 billion extended agreement with Burger King Corp. which will create thousands of black and working-class jobs. By 1992, Burger King is to increase its black franchise owners from 70 to 550.

The deal provides for money to black-owned food distributors, advertising agencies and landscapers. It even calls for the company to send many of its employees to black physicians for their regular physicals.

Despite the obvious limitations of these types of "corporate covenants," they illustrate that the economic and political

pressure tactics espoused and implemented by Jackson can yield real benefits. Conversely, the "Jesse-bashing" rhetoric of Barbara Jordan and Co. leads the black community to a political dead end.

Jackson correctly senses that political cowardice, in this era of conservatism, will never provide the way forward.

So far the Rainbow Coalition has tried to push the Democratic Party back to liberalism and away from its dangerous flirtation with Reaganism. Sooner or later, the coalition must begin to address the question, "Is it too late to move the Democratic Party back to the left?"

The Democratic Leadership Council makes it perfectly clear that it sees no future for the type of progressivism Jackson personifies.

If a Sam Nunn, or Chuck Robb, or Gary Hart won the Democratic nomination, what kind of policy concessions would we receive for our electoral support, if any? If there is no real difference between the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates on policy issues, would our energies be better used in local electoral and social protest activities?

These are the hard issues which Jackson and his supporters must address in the coming months.

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"I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right and to walk with them. ... I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity."

-- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., speaking shortly before his death on April 4, 1968