

# FORUM

## Homecoming: not a time to keep score



**Nigel Alston**

**Motivational Moments**

*"We ourselves must be full of life if we are going to make life fuller for others."*

- David Sawyer

My wife and I recently attended our 25th class reunion and homecoming at our alma mater, Livingstone College.

Armed with our "schedule of events" for the weekend, we looked forward to reconnecting with our classmates, walking across the campus reminiscing and observing the next generation of Fighting Blue Bears.

Homecoming is the event of the year for many graduates, their families, friends and anyone else associated with the school.

Alumni chapters engage in friendly competition to raise money for the school.

It's an extended family reunion, with football as an excuse for people to come together to celebrate. I don't think there is quite anything like a black college homecoming and the atmosphere it creates. It is like a jolt of caffeine; it's a high that keeps you going until the next year.

It's easy to get fired up hearing the noise of the crowd as it cheers the home team on and watching people reunite and get excited talking to each other about old

times.

That's what I did when I bumped into a friend I hadn't seen in 25 years.

The two of us played football together. Now he's retired from the military and has just begun another career.

"You remember him, don't you?" another friend asked.

My football buddy stood there smiling, looking at me, as the memories rushed back. We laughed and talked for the remainder of the game.

He had brought his family along also to experience the game, meet the people who shared his college experience and see the place where he had spent perhaps the most carefree years of his life.

Even though he didn't graduate from Livingstone, he still calls it home.

As old friendships were being rekindled, the sound of the band's drums vibrated through bodies as cheerleaders "shook their stuff," unaware of the mini-reunions taking place.

Everyone was in his own world.

As vendors marched up and down the bleachers, hawking wares that ranged from T-shirts to key chains, old friends were greeting one another.

The Greek plots and parking lots were filled with people touching base with one another.

Volunteer groups, including churches, sold hot dogs, chicken and "wash pot" fish plates to the



Nigel Alston poses with his then-girlfriend, Sarah, while students at Livingstone College. She is now his wife.

hungry throng. We sat down at one table - under a funeral home tent - to a plate of hot fish, coleslaw and two pieces of white bread. Of course we had the customary bottle of hot sauce and a cold drink.

Homecoming queens and their courts were escorted with pomp on and off the field. It is a

fashion show - styling and profiling - that included hip-hop baggy jeans and FUBU to full-length fur coats that come out of storage despite the warm weather.

One person sported a crushed velvet black suit with matching top hat and shades.

I watched him model his

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## Has black middle class gone soft on civil rights

**Armstrong Williams**

**Guest Columnist**

The goal of the momentous '60s Civil Rights Movement was straightforward: End segregation. The landmark legislation passed during that era was aimed at searing a single idea into the American consciousness: equality among white America and its former slaves.

Thirty years later, millions of apparently successful black people have come to believe that they are really lost souls. Despite the obvious gains, there is much talk about their victimization at the hands of a cruelly unjust past. This belief in a nebulous past dragging down perfectly competent blacks has become so widespread as to exert considerable influence over colleges and corporations which regularly employ racial quotas. The major implication: In the post civil rights era, black Americans have become all too comfortable identifying themselves as victims.

It occurs to me that our post civil rights culture has become terribly soft. Just name your problem, sit back and blame racism. Personal responsibility and will seem to fall by the wayside of a culture that is obsessed, often to the exclusion of all else, with their victim status.

A whole cottage industry has been sprung around this idea. The Congressional Black Caucus supports the NAACP lawsuit that alleges that gun manufacturers distribute their product irresponsibly to blacks. The major implication: The gun manufacturers bear ultimate responsibility for the high rate of gun violence among black youths. It occurs to me that the person pulling the trigger should

take at least some of the responsibility. But not in the post civil rights culture. We are all victims, right?

Victims of what, one might ask? Victims of the past; victims of social hierarchies; victims of huge, white conglomerates that turn innocent black youths into killing machines. "Victims all" has become the rallying cry. Never mind that to blame white people for much of one's problems implies that white people have all the answers. That in itself empowers people to believe that race controls your destiny.

Of course, one would be foolish to argue that racism doesn't exist. But to make people believe that 50 percent of where they are is determined by race is worse than stupid. It is harmful, degrading and a passive form of enslavement; it passively reinforces those old racial hierarchies which deem whites the masters. When, I wonder, is the Congressional Black Caucus and its ilk going to take a new look at race and focus on what it takes to achieve the American dream? Because the notion that all blacks are victims of this country's shared history is worse than radical or destabilizing, it is inherently self-limiting.

Plainly, to regard all members of a group as victims neatly removes such terms as "character" and "personal responsibility" from the cultural dialogue. After all, what need is there for individual striving when it is plainly understood that all the difficulties which black Americans suffer are the direct, indisputable result of their shared past?

I realize that racial barriers which prevent us from pursuing those rights we equate with liberty must be removed. Somewhere along the way, though, we got soft. It started when we began to embrace the idea that the best way to assuage racism of the past is by

practicing reverse-racism now. Programs like affirmative action bloomed in the popular consciousness. These programs go well beyond that momentous civil rights legislation of the '60s and argue not for equality, but for retribution. I am reminded of that shrewd mind, Albert Einstein, who once noted, "You cannot solve the problem with the same kind of thinking that has created the problem."

Unfortunately, that's precisely what the advocates of affirmative action are attempting to do - assuage the problem of racism in the past by practicing reverse-racism now.

A generation later, many blacks feel they are owed retribution. There is some validity to this sort of thinking. A shared history of slavery and discrimination has ingrained racial hierarchies into our national identity. The danger lies in embracing this view as some sort of bleak, all-encompassing half-truth which reduces all members of a race, sex, etc. to victims.

When, for example, Harvard psychiatrist Alvin Pousaint insists that racism is genetic-based, he is implying that racism is a mental illness. Thus, racism is transformed into a disease over which we have no control - all of our racial woes the result of a few misfiring synapses. Victims, all of us. Not unlike how the NAACP and the Congressional Black Caucus place the onus of responsibility for gun violence among black youths on the gun manufacturers, as opposed to the ones actually pulling the triggers.

Plainly, this sort of thinking does not truly concern itself with justice. Instead, it concerns itself with victimization. Affirmative action, Pousaint's theory of racially-biased genetic strands, the NAACP lawsuit against gun manufacturers all carry with them an implicit message: All members of a

fixed group - blacks, females, those of us with a bad set of genes, etc. - are victims. Because of this victim status, the logic goes, they are owed special treatment. The emphasis is on retribution, rather than conventional social activism.

Owed? Victims, all of us? As we slouch toward a new millennium, surely there are some blacks who do not view themselves inferior, right?

If not, it occurs to me that organizations like the Congressional Black Caucus have become the subtle dispensers of a warm drug, a surrender of the will to the feelings of victimization. They are our cultural prophets, our torchbearers in the dark. The only problem is that they are embracing the idea that all blacks are victims. They assert that blacks are owed affirmative action so as to rectify the overt racism of the past. To embrace this idea, though, is to risk creating a culture of victimization which never moves beyond the initial steps of the '60s civil rights legislation.

Booker T Washington once said, "The black man who cannot let love and sympathy go out to the white man is but half free. The white man who retards his own development by opposing a black man is but half free." I hereby propose that these words receive more attention.

One does not change the dynamic of racism by standing outside of the box and shaking his fists. Doing so marginalizes his own views as "extremist." Even worse, the fist shaker defines himself not by his authentic experience, but in relation to certain racial hierarchies and implied social values. Until he defines himself by his own ability to move forward in this phenomenal world, he is but half free.

As a child growing up on a farm, I was taught that personal

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