

OPINION/ FORUM

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The Urban Crisis



Ron Walters
Guest Columnist

It was with some concern that when the 16 year-old student Derrion Albert was killed recently by other youth wielding wooden clubs in Chicago, the White House responded by deciding to send Attorney General Eric Holder and Schools Chief Arne Duncan into the fray. First of all, we should be pleased that this incident attracted action by the White House at all, but my concern is that at base it is really not an issue of policing or one of school administration, since 400 youths have been killed in Chicago in the past year.

The missing piece of this was the White House Office on Urban Affairs. In his latest book, *More Than Just Race*, Professor William Julius Wilson's legendary research on Chicago poverty concludes that people behave the way they are socialized and structural racism has had a big role in developing the culture through which blacks view and engage the world. He means by structural racism, segregation - isolation - from other races through systematic patterns of housing placement and discrimination, the lack of productive work and its replacement by illicit activity, intractable poverty and the psychological reinforcement of negative status stereotypes, and other things. These things undercut positive parenting and shape the response of youth to events in their environment.

Where Wilson comes out then is where many behavioral scientists do: environment has a strong influence on behavior and most often, one institution, such as the school is not strong enough to change it. This points back to doing something about the urban environment which has a systemic impact on the behavior of youths and others. With a 50 percent unemployment rate in most big cities for youth 16-18 years old, most youths now days leave school not headed for jobs, so what about using the Stimulus money to create more jobs for them? With the home foreclosure rate bringing down the price of housing, why not make it more attractive for low-income families to get normal mortgages and get out of apartments? And with the Stimulus grants now emphasizing the greening of public housing and other facilities, why not begin robust job

training programs for youths who live in these areas?

This has to do with Urban policy, but when I look at what the new White House Office is doing, it seems from the tour in which Director Adolfo Carrion has been engaged, the emphasis is on fostering regional economic growth or "sustainability." That is fine in one sense, because it fits in with my emphasis on jobs, but I don't see robust programs in the tour preparing low-income folks to participate in the new opportunities that have come on stream in cities like Kansas City, Mo.; Portland Oregon; and Denver Colorado.

Well, on one hand I get it, Urban policy has been so maligned in the past 30 years by conservatives that it has been ignored because it was problem oriented and peoples of color were pegged as the reason for the problems as opposed to the conditions under which most were forced to live. The Obama Administration is attempting to change the image of cities by connecting them to metro areas and placing them in the role of the engines of growth for the country and for their impact on the global economy.

This fair enough, but I don't see how it works with Blacks and Hispanics becoming a larger share of the population and constituting populations that experience many of the social problems that drove whites away from cities into the suburbs in the first place. And now that Whites are coming back into many cities and Blacks are moving to the suburbs, the problems that were once considered strictly "Urban" are now part of the Metro areas.

So, there still needs to be strong programs dealing with poverty elimination, job creation, excellent education in the public schools, and the like. All of the research I have seen suggests when this happens and the environment improves, violence will decrease. Without urgent action, the White House had better get ready for an increase in such violent incidents among youth in other cities as the unemployment rate for Blacks moves from 16 percent now to over 20 percent by next year.

So, I would hope that the White House does not make the Chicago situation a "drive-by" event but uses it as a paradigm for its new approach to urban-metro America.

Dr. Ron Walters is Professor of Government and Politics Emeritus at the University of Maryland College Park. His latest book is, *The Price of Racial Reconciliation*.

Clarifications

The pool chair at the Winston Lake Family YMCA that is referenced in the Sept. 17 story, "Uplifted," was made possible with a grant from the Winston-Salem Foundation. The Foundation's involvement was not known at the time that the story was published.

In last week's issue, in the story about the Bethesda Center, the wrong name was printed for Center Social Worker Pamela Hinton, pictured.



Africans on way to More Exploitation



Peter Bailey
Guest Columnist

A recent advertising supplement, "Africa on the Agenda," in The Washington Post included, among other things, the following observations: "Africa (is) - the key to global economic growth" ...

"Despite the downturn, the rate of return on foreign direct investment is higher in the African continent than it is anywhere else in the developing world ...

"The continent (Africa) has approximately 60 percent of the world's diamonds, 40 percent of its phosphate, 30 percent of its cobalt and 10 to 15 percent of the world's proven oil and gas reserves ...

"If you view the world from a prism of resource scarcity, Africa's vast natural resources make the continent a vital provider of future global growth."

A visitor from somewhere like Mars would read these observations and conclude that African people must be doing very well, indeed. Those in the real world know the real deal. There are millions of people living on the continents of

Europe, North America and parts of Asia living very, very well because of their exploitation of Africa's vast amount of natural resources. But most of the people in the African continent have not and will not benefit from the abundance of valuable resources, unless people on the continent and people of African descent around the world get on the case.

Master Teacher Malcolm X once said that as a child and young man, he heard people say "You don't have a Chinaman's chance" to accomplish or gain whatever, but now that China is a major force on the world scene, he noted, people don't say that anymore, and China has become something of a protector for people of Chinese descent throughout the world. A strong and prosperous Africa, he stated, would provide the same kind of coverage for people of African descent throughout the world. Such a circumstance is not going to just happen; Africans and people of African descent must make it happen.

There is absolutely no valid reason for African people to be the economically poorest and most exploited people on Earth. This situation can be

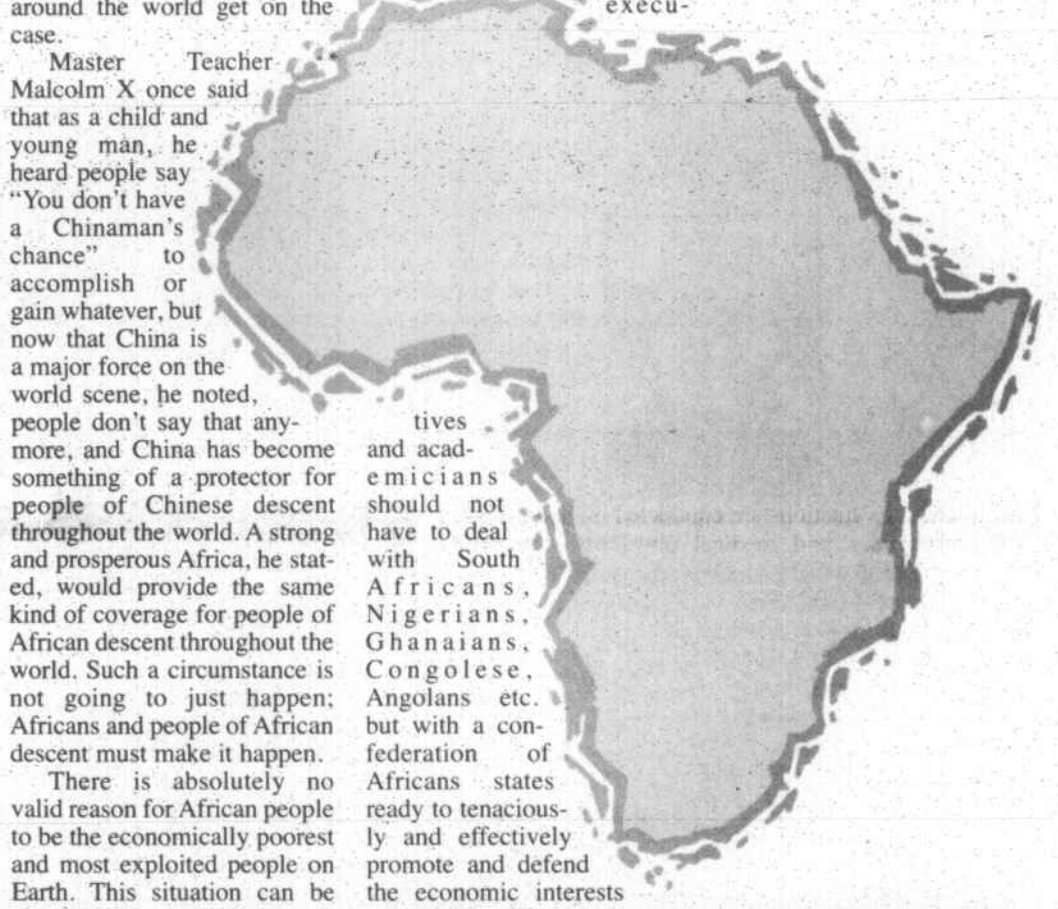
and must be changed. And it can be successfully dealt with if committed, resilient, talented, determined, resourceful and Africa-oriented leaders and people decide to pool their energy, skills and resources.

American; British; Russian; Japanese; Chinese and Indian governments, corporate execu-

tives and academicians should not have to deal with South Africans, Nigerians, Ghanaians, Congolese, Angolans etc. but with a confederation of Africans states ready to tenaciously and effectively promote and defend the economic interests

of the whole continent. That is the only way to avoid continuous demeaning exploitation.

Journalist/Lecturer A. Peter Bailey, a former associate editor of *Ebony*, is currently editor of *Vital Issues: The Journal of African American Speeches*. He can be reached at apeterb@verizon.net.



Brutal honesty about ACORN



Al Sharpton
Guest Columnist

It was the 1960s, and after decades following the abolishment of slavery, African-Americans were still vying for simple fundamental human rights, including the most basic form of involvement in society - voting.

Routinely disenfranchised from the process via underhanded tactics such as literacy tests and more blatant intimidation methods like outright murder and violence, the Black community found itself intricately excluded from actively participating in any discourse that may have altered their lives for the better. Following the murder of voting-rights activists in places like Mississippi and Alabama, the President and Congress finally passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that aimed to ensure equality in our election process.

Though we may not be physically attacked at voting stations or forced to pay fees at the ballot box, people of color are once again being excluded from the process in much more underhanded and disturbing ways. And the campaign to end ACORN is the clearest, prime example before our eyes.

The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, better known by its acronym ACORN, was established in 1970 and through the years has worked diligently to register individu-



The ACORN flag flies above a rally in Canada.

als from disenfranchised neighborhoods, help construct schools, find affordable housing for the poor and more. It is in fact the largest membership organization of low and medium income people, and it has itself employed more than 13,000 registration assistance workers throughout the country. Its housing corporation has assisted over 50,000 families facing foreclosure, and its tax and benefit centers have helped over 150,000 low-income families receive over \$190 million in Earned Income Tax Credits and other refunds. But perhaps most impressive under ACORN's extensive accolades has been its ability to register some 1.3 million to vote - and hence help give a voice to those who have been silenced for much too long.

For the past few weeks, the media has been fixated on a video that depicts ACORN workers allegedly giving

advice to a man and a woman posing as a pimp and prostitute. While the authenticity of this tape is still being investigated, let's not underscore the fact that the man behind the footage, James O'Keefe, is a longtime right-wing agitator and instigator who has a lengthy history of targeting reform institutions. Let's not forget that FOX News, upset over its dwindling viewership and simultaneous dwindling advertising dollars, has made it a point to attack anything that may have helped the first Black President win office.

And let's not dismiss the persistent and consistent efforts of conservatives to take down ACORN throughout the years, with trumped up voter fraud charges and more.

Even if we were to pretend that the footage of this tape has been authenticated, it still does not justify a cease of Federal funds to this vital

organization. In no way am I condoning the behavior of these ACORN employees if they were in fact violating legal and ethical rules. But a few bad employees cannot account for the elimination of an entire institution that is so integral in our most underserved communities. Without grants from the Housing and Urban Development Department, ACORN would not be able to provide counseling on housing, education and outreach. And without governmental funds, it could no longer work with partners like Health Care for America Now to win the campaign on health reform.

It's time to be brutally honest about the ACORN debacle. It's about politics; it's about the 2010 mid-term election; it's about power and maintenance of the status quo; it's about the right to vote; and it's about the continued oppression of an already suppressed group. I haven't forgotten about the attempts to juxtapose President Obama with ACORN during the campaign. I don't ignore the fact that ACORN has consistently been depicted as a Black institution, when in fact it is not. And I shudder to think what would happen if we continue down this dangerous course of eliminating any individual or group that fights for the empowerment of the weak.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was established to level the playing field and remind everyone of our constitutional guarantees. Let us not regress now.

The Rev. Al Sharpton is head of the National Action Network.