

editorials & comments

Black People Are Invisible

From time to time the actions of omissions of white Americans have reminded us of the truism in Ralph Ellison's best seller novel of yesteryear, "The Invisible Man," which says black people are invisible as if non-existent because whites have largely ignored them and their contributions.

Now, in the 1980's, blacks have been given a new dimension of invisibility in that once seen in certain presumed situations, then any and all blacks are one and the same and all look alike. This new invisibility parallels the story of the arrival of a Chinese student at Columbia University. When asked what was his first impression of America, he said, "I find it strange that all white Americans have slanted eyes." Undoubtedly, the Chinese student was obsessed with a need to be around his own countrymen. Therefore, in the absence of large numbers of Chinese people, the student created an illusion that in his mind Columbia University was populated with Chinese people.

Black Americans, as the "invisible man" of whites, have traditionally been insulted, ignored, buried as mere footnotes in history if recognized at all, and have often seen others assume credit for their cultural contributions. However, the new invisible black man is seeing his freedom, and indeed his life threatened, by an almost reverse invisibility. Three contemporary historic facts clearly illustrate our point.

Alleged Robbery

First, is the now well known case of Lennell Geter, 26, of Denmark, S.C., and a S.C. State College-trained engineer who was convicted and sentenced to life in prison for an alleged \$615 hold up of a restaurant in a small Texan town near Greenville, Texas, where he worked.

In spite of testimony by his supervisor and eight other co-workers that he, Geter, was at work at the time of the alleged robbery, and with the Bamberg, S.C. sheriff hotly denying that he told a Greenville, Texas, police lieutenant that Geter was wanted for 30 robberies in South Carolina, the all-white jury found Geter guilty and a judge sentenced him to life in prison.

Geter's co-workers and friends say he is a victim of mistaken

identity. Yet, Sgt. Donald Kuhn, the arresting officer, said, "First of all, it's real hard when you're dealing with the black race to get an identification made. Most people say they all look alike." Four white witnesses to the robbery identified Geter from among pictures of five other blacks.

Clamor Of Racism

After serving 477 days in jail, Geter is now free on bond awaiting a possible new trial amid the clamor of racism, shoddy police work and the questioning of a Geter look alike.

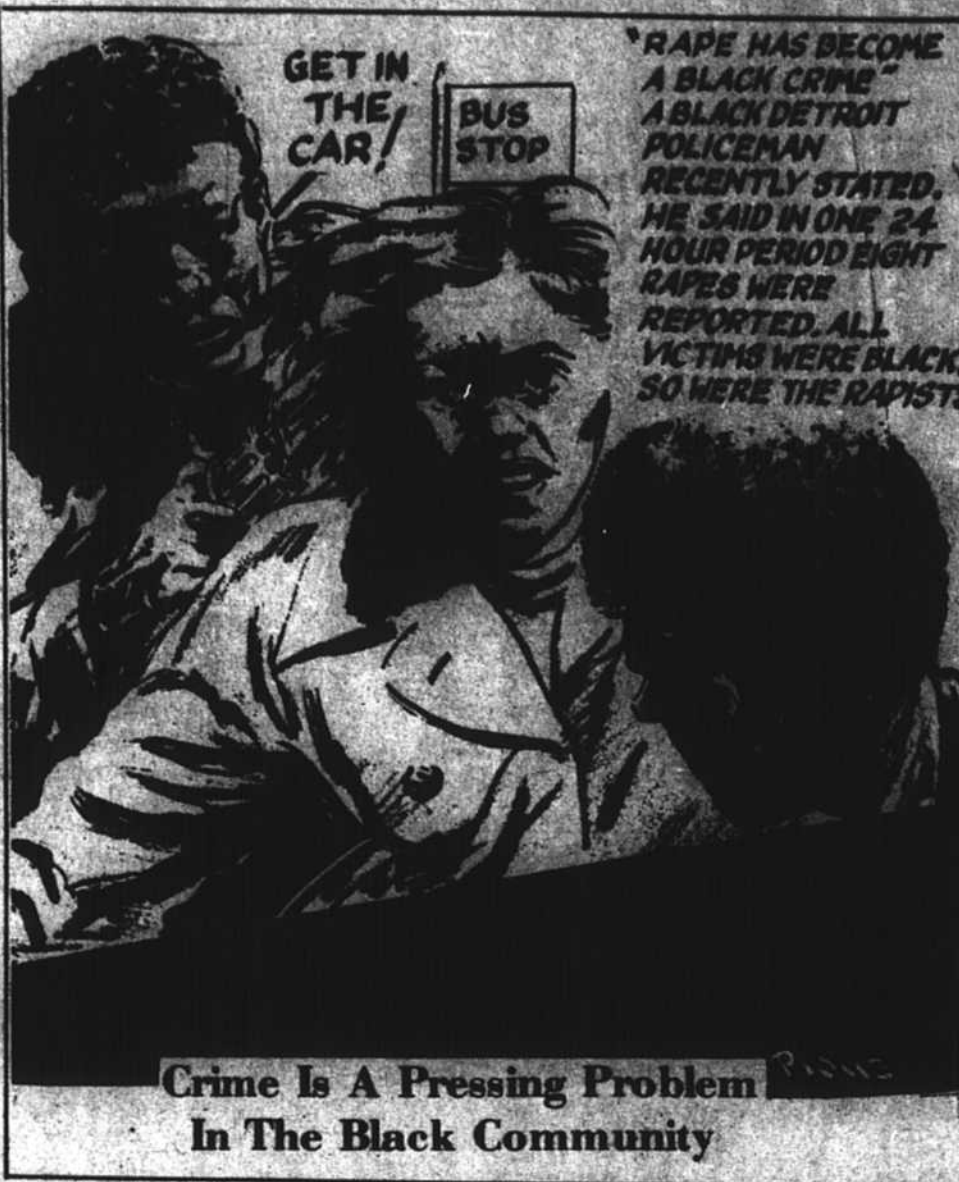
Secondly, Ted Alexander, a 25 year-old black man with no police record, was convicted in Statesville, N.C. by an all-white jury and sent to prison for 14 years for the alleged robbery of a second hand radio and \$18.

During the two-hour trial Alexander denied the charge and his court-appointed attorney, who admitted to having limited criminal work experience, called no other witnesses and made no effort to have the trial postponed to find alibi witnesses.

While being identified as one of four black men involved in the May 20 robbery, two of the actual robbers testified that they did not know Alexander and he was not involved in the robbery. Furthermore, a woman who did not have an opportunity to testify claims that Alexander was with her at the time of the robbery.

Thirdly, after a few denials, the U.S. Supreme Court has begun to review the jury selection process that allows attorneys for the plaintiffs and defendants to reject prospective jurors without cause. This has led to the exclusion of blacks from jury duty where the plaintiffs are white and the defendants are black; thus, the new invisible man conviction as in the cases cited here.

The Supreme Court's earlier refusal to impose relevant "jury of your peers" standards may have led to other blacks being convicted on the new invisible man mentality. Fortunately, due to the re-thinking by the high court as result of encouragement by Justice Thurgood Marshall, we may see a chance in the jury selection process. This would be a major step toward correcting one of the unjust aspects of our criminal justice system.



Letters To: The Editor

Stand Up For Rights Of Others

To The Editor:
There was a time when America represented an "Alliance for Progress," not one of despair; when America was a beacon of hope for the down-trodden and oppressed masses; when tin-horned dictators, reactionary goons and gangsters didn't have a friend in the White House.

An America that was truly fair, unfortunately, never was. Homes and parks used to be up where now only new office buildings, convention centers, and sports stadiums seem to rise.

The poor used to open cans of soup or beans instead of combing through garbage cans, and sleep in flop houses instead of on street corners. Even the misers used to pretend to believe in equality, and the selfish anti-Judo-Christian philosophies which are now taking charge, such as EST, were unknown or were considered strange cults.

We need to return to the willingness to stand up for the rights and needs of others, for the war on poverty, and even for the

work camps and teach-ins. American has faced many and varied challenges throughout the years. Some of the greatest have been indirect and subtle, McCarthyism, with its anti-communist myths and hysteria, had been aimed far more pointedly at our own revolutionary traditions than at the Russians.

A one-third century of cold war rhetoric and burdensome military expenditures have eaten away at our democratic, egalitarian and revolutionary traditions. The ideological bull about the solidarity of the working class, and the illusions that the greatest leadership comes from the most oppressed victims, hasn't helped matters.

We must take back our flag from the foreign con-artists like Rev. Moon, and the domestic reactionaries who try to use the flag to oppose the equality and justice for which it stands.

We need to become insulted when the flag is printed on inferior merchandise, and to become incensed when companies like American Express

abuse the Statue of Liberty, and other symbols with crass commercialism - incensed enough to write indignant letters insisting that one can still love the Statue of Liberty without using American Express charge cards.

Let us try to return to Camelot. Let's try to be proud of our American symbols, and make them again stand for something that is worthy of respect, not fear. Let us reunite as one people and not forget the slow, balanced march toward equality that our forebearers steered us toward.

Jim Roberson

SOMETHING ON YOUR MIND?

Do you have something to say? Then do so for everyone to read. The Charlotte Post, the only other voice in town, welcomes all letters on various subjects.

Write: Editor, P. O. Box 30144, Charlotte, N.C. 28230.

WITH SABRINA JOHNSON



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Church Versus State?

Traditionally, the church has been a motivating force in the black community. The community looked and looks to the church for religious guidance, education, help during needy times and a place to build social and political opinions. A great majority of known black leaders and innovators gained their strength, support and popularity through the church. They achieved this by incorporating the teachings of the Bible and God, and seeing the need for social reform and civil rights gained.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one such leader. Dr. King began his campaign for civil rights in his neighborhood church. As the need to achieve equality and civil rights became more important, the power and substance of Dr. King's speeches spread throughout the community into the state, thus leading to national recognition. The power source for Dr. King was the church. The struggle and philosophy of Dr. King were commonly referred to in sermons and church meetings. Dr. King worked through the building church and not the religion of the church.

When Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat on the bus to a white person, the nation's media began to focus directly on the developing civil rights movement. Dr. King called upon the church people to protest and boycott against the bus companies nationwide for making black people sit at the rear of the bus. The people answered and peacefully began to take action.

Democratic Presidential candidate Rev. Jesse Jackson is using the tool of the church to launch his campaign for the Presidency. Rev. Jackson has appeared in many churches delivering his campaign speeches and partaking in brief question and answer sessions. He speaks in the church building and not of religion. Many of these church people are endorsing the Jackson candidacy.

Critics of Jackson claim that he is not supporting and enforcing "the separation of church and state" by campaigning in churches. What the critics fail to explain is the exact meaning of church. If they are referring to the building, Jackson has every right to campaign there as he does to campaign in the civic center - a place of gathering. If the critics are

referring to the religious aspect of church, Jackson seems to have successfully maneuvered around bringing religion into his campaign. The church building is a place to gather for religious purposes, social purposes and even political and economic purposes - Jackson goes for the last set and is gaining some strength for his campaign.

As Dr. King did, Rev. Jackson must begin to move out of the church building and on to places where larger numbers of people can gather to listen to his speeches. The few times the nation has seen Jackson was during his humanitarian mission to Syria for the release of Lt. Robert Goodman. Jackson achieved his goal and was briefly heard during and shortly after the release and has almost but all disappeared from national television and newspaper.

One of the main reasons why the King civil rights movement was successful was due to the fact that it was forced upon the public through strong media coverage. Each stepping stone was brought into American homes each day with explicit details. Jackson's campaign trail is not as strong and alive as it should be because Jackson thrives on the security of the church building with predominantly black audiences into which the media stays clear because of the church building. If Jackson wants to be considered a strong opponent he must attack top priority issues and problems in a free space such as a civic center or hotel ballroom. He must face the issues and problems and address them as to his solutions. Question: What are Jackson's opinions on the issues of U.S. troops in Lebanon, women's issues, defense spending, the national deficit, unemployment, social security and import-export agreements? Who knows?

There are flaws in all the candidates' campaigns and the flaws can be repaired; however, if Jackson does not make a move getting out there and hustling political support, his campaign may go unnoticed by the nation. The act of Lt. Robert Goodman was a good start, so why not keep the campaign up stride for stride by competing on a wider level than in the churches.

The King movement was able to chip away at most of the color separation barriers and encircle a vast number of people to make things change, which they did. Jackson cannot win the campaign solely on the black vote.

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From Capitol Hill

Problems Confronting Black Farmers

At the rate blacks are losing farmland it is predicted that by 1990, there will be only about 10,000 black farms in this country. While all farms are declining, black farmers are losing land more than twice as fast as the national average. Between 1969 and 1978, the total number of farms declined by 23.8 percent, but the number of black farms for that same period declined by 37.2 percent. The vast majority of black farms, 85.6 percent, were under 50 acres in size.

Problems confronting black farmers are: racial discrimination, lack of institutional economic support and tax structure geared to benefit large farm operations.

The Civil Rights Commission issued an alarming report on discrimination in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in dispersing federal funds to farmers.

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) is the principal lending institution for rural farmers. These programs have the capability to provide immediate direct assistance to black farmers to prevent their loss. It was found that in 1978 the average black farm income was \$7,584, compared to \$17,325 for whites. USDA and FmHA have failed to integrate civil rights goals in program objectives and



Alfreda L. Madison

to use enforcement mechanisms to ensure black farmers equal opportunities in farm credit programs. The proportion of FmHA loans made to black farmers has declined annually since 1980. Included in the loans assistance is a requirement that minority farmers would receive low interest loans. The Commission found that the majority of minority farmers were not provided low interest, but instead received their loans at regular interest rates and in some states, black borrowers received proportionately fewer limited resources than whites.

The Commission investigation revealed that FmHA contributes to the black farmers' problem. Hearings before the Conservation Credit and Rural Development on H.R. 1190, supported the Commission's findings. Executive Director of the National Sharecroppers Fund,

Katherine Waller, described discrimination in handling FmHA funds in North Carolina. She explained the discriminatory lending policies in predominantly black counties.

Secretary of Agriculture Block, after several months, responded to the Commission's report. He stated that FmHA makes only a small contribution to farmers and that no difference should be made for black farmers; given the small number of black farmers, FmHA does not serve them well.

USDA has not been enforcing civil rights laws. Isidore Rodriguez, Director of Minority Affairs of USDA, asserted that groups which benefit from the civil rights policy have not been political supporters of the Administration, and that other groups are tired of ethnic favoritism. Discrimination investigations under Rodriguez decreased from 90 in 1961 to none in 1982 and the compliance of field reviews from 92 to none.

Rodriguez was later dismissed and Secretary Block promised civil rights enforcement improvement. Yet, in a letter to Mr. Block in March, 1983, the Civil Rights Commission noted no improvements since February 1982, but that the civil rights enforcement had worsened. The FmHA black farm

loans had declined steadily since 1980 and that FmHA black employment had fallen, despite overall agency employment increase.

The number of loans made to blacks declined by 20 percent between 1980 and 1982. Only one out of four black loans was received at the low interest rate. In many states, blacks have a very slim chance of receiving the low interest loans.

In 113 loans made to blacks in Arkansas and 92 in Virginia, only one in each state received a low interest loan, and out of the 92 in Georgia, three received low interest loans.

FmHA employment rose between March, 1982, and October, 1982, by 440 or five percent, while minority employment for the same period fell from 11.2 to 10.7 percent.

The Office of Minority Affairs (OMA) has the responsibility of investigation and compliance, prior to 1982 was done annually. Only one investigation was made in 1982 and no on-site compliance was made. OMA discontinued the Equal Opportunity Program in USDA, which had been issued annually since 1972. Federal agencies are required to submit implementation plans to the Justice Department for civil rights enforcement.