

# Kemp: Substance Over Rhetoric?

What a difference a day makes. Only 24 hours after taking office, Jack Kemp, the new Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, pledged himself and the Bush Administration to a war against "the intractable problems of the inner cities."

Since over 50 percent of the U.S. Black population lives in the top 20 urban markets, Kemp's pledge amounts to a commitment to Black America. Moreover, it is coming from the officials of a party that is largely perceived by Blacks as bigoted.

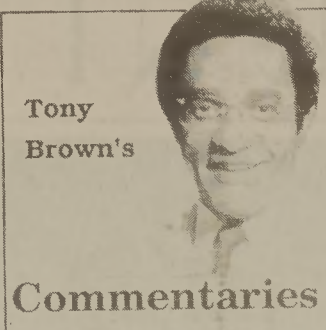
President Bush understand. Jack Kemp, who identified himself and his subalterns as "the cutting edge" of the Republican Party's appeal to Americanized Africans, obviously recognizes that overt demonstrations to Blacks must accompany the new rhetoric.

So, true to form, as many Whites do when approaching the Black Unknown, the GOP leadership is playing it safe. In this GOP equation, being Black replaces the traditional values, so often referred to by President Bush.

The new Republican Party chairman, guitar-playing Lee Atwater, joined the GOP chorus when he courted the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. via the already over-solicited Coretta King in a speech on King's birthday.

In his campaign to get 50 percent of the Black vote within the next 10 years, "The Dream" was hailed. "The Man" was adored. "The Family" was worshipped. No mention was made that King's work is dead.

Most of all, there was no mention of what today's earth-bound Blacks have to do to continue King's work or to resurrect themselves. Ironically, Atwater's speech contained less self-



Tony Brown's

## Commentaries

help advice than Jesse Jackson's stump speech -- and Jackson is a Social Democrat, to the left of Hubert Humphrey.

Of course, I'm being unfairly critical of Atwater's speech. In today's environment, no White can tell Blacks the truth. At least, he made it through the day without being labeled a racist.

So if White Republicans are not going to (or cannot) tell Black people to help themselves, how are they going to convert them to the party of Frederick Douglass and "opportunity?"

The obvious strategy is to meet with the "established" Black leaders and win the Black masses over with press releases and photo opportunities showing important GOP officials with Jesse Jackson and Coretta King, among others.

At best, it's a superficial approach; at worst, it's patronizing and racist. Racist because it assumes that all Blacks want more welfare, more Democratic Party lies and are incapable of comprehending and implementing their own liberation.

This is what I believe Robert Woodson, a fiercely independent Black man (not a conser-

vative, as the White press identifies him), was trying to tell Jack Kemp when he turned down the number two job at HUD and the distinction of becoming one of the highest-ranking Blacks in the administration.

Under Woodson's leadership, the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise has created, funded and supervised the only innovative self-help projects in inner cities among underclass Blacks. The Blacks being courted by Messrs. Bush, Atwater and Kemp have created solicitation programs only. They have erected no living monuments as has the outspoken Woodson.

Atwater and especially Kemp are good men with a good idea, but they are on the verge of destroying a historic window of opportunity that will be short-lived if they don't seek substance instead of rhetoric.

Kemp said, "The best thing I can do to make my party appealing to Black people is to lead a successful attack on poverty." Wrong. The best thing he can do is to help Black people lead their own self-determined attack.

In my opinion, Kemp sounded like Woodson when he said he wanted Blacks "to seize new jobs and opportunities for themselves... without illusion... and with the recognition that government can't solve all problems."

If Kemp believes that, why seek out the Black leaders who don't?

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## Letters To The Post

### Insistence On Behalf Of Our Children

Dear Editor:

On January 11, 1989, the School Board released the CAT test scores broken down by race. The information confirmed what a lot of us already knew: blacks students lag by 40 to 60 percentile points behind whites.

Charlotte's testing specialist indicated that parents' education influenced student achievement. In essence, parental education has more influence on student achievement than race.

This is the conclusion they gave us for not teaching a sizeable amount of our students. A large number of these children are black children. Our school system (we pay more than our share of taxes to support it), should not be designed to teach only an elite population. We must have a school system that teaches all of our children regardless of their parents' educational level.

Black parents should be extremely sensitive to the fact that so many of our children are underachievers because we

know how hard it is when we do have all the right credentials. Children who are defined as "at risk" (and the school system knows who they are) should be given special resources to make up for what they do not have at home. Sure, there is an expense involved, but our children are worth every penny of it. They should be in an environment where the classroom size is small, where they are given specialists to work with them and where they have supplemental training, especially with computers. It can be done. We must insist that it be done.

The issue is not integrated schools or the "choice" plan. The issue is whether or not our children are being taught once they get to the school. If that school is 30 minutes away or five minutes away is not the issue. It becomes an issue when the principal of that school or the superintendent of the school system does not set the leadership in demanding that all of our children be

taught regardless of race, creed, religion or the "educational level" of their parents. I am certain, more than ever, that going to schools that are predominantly white is not a guarantee for success. Our children are failing miserably in a school system that resents them and does not understand the environment from which they come.

We as a community must not leave it up to the School Board to come up with a "winning solution" to help our children to succeed. We must work with them. We must continually come forward and present our concerns and recommendations to them. We must come as a community and we must be willing to stand up as individuals. Nobody, nobody loves our children like we do.

I would love to talk with anyone who would like to be a part of coming up with a "winning solution" to help our children succeed.

JUDY JAMES POTTER

### Why Rancor Towards Black Women?

Dear Editor:

It behooves me to question your criteria for allowing Ms. A.C. Metcalf one quarter of your editorial page (February 16, 1989) for her most condescending commentary. To whom is this proverbial "they" which she refers to with such rancor? From what perspective has she observed and concluded that the black female's mind is "underdeveloped," "ill-equipped" and "stagnant?" How dare she state this with a universality which includes me and, ironically, herself?

I understand the premise of her argument, however, it does not require three sarcastic, su-

perfluous and divisive columns. Simply stated, you can't teach what you don't know. In order for our children to meet and compete in society they must have a broader knowledge base and so too must the women who effect their lives significantly.

Although I resent the style in which her letter was written, I recognize the passion and frustration of wanting more for our young people. I was fortunate to have a mother (and father) who educated, cultivated and loved me. But love is not one of Ms. Metcalf's essentials. Maybe that is why she

chooses to write letters to the editor.

I chose to share my travels, my lessons, my concerns and advice as a volunteer working with young adults in the black community.

More essential than any collegiate dictionary, map or almanac (all of which are accessible through the library) is the recognition that "they" are "we!" When we learn to nurture and feel responsible for each black child as if he or she were our own, then, just maybe, as a people we will survive.

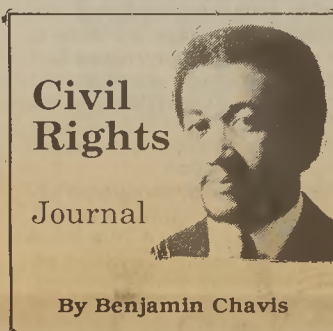
B.E. NOEL

# African-American Men: "School Daze"

The American Council on Education has just released a report that has far-reaching implications for the future development of the African-American community. During the last 10 years, there has been a decline in the enrollment, particularly of African-American males, in colleges throughout the United States. At a time when this society continues to advance into a high tech society, the results of this report will only mean an increase in the already devastating percentage of unemployment in the African-American community.

While millions of people received a nostalgic reminder of African-American college life last year in Spike Lee's film "School Daze," the reality is that on many college campuses, the sight of African-American men as students is becoming uncommon. The report also documents that this trend is true even at predominantly African-American colleges and universities.

The American Council on Education reported that African-American enrollment in higher education reached its highest level in 1980, with about 1.1 million out of a total 11.8 million undergraduate and graduate



Civil Rights

Journal

By Benjamin Chavis

stated that as African-American women pull ahead of African-American men, "the social distance and hostility between men and women" is likely to increase, seriously harming "social integration within the black community as a whole."

It is our hope that the findings of the report on college enrollment will serve as a challenge rather than as an epitaph on the grave of the progress of African-Americans in this society. There will be many different social analyses drawn from this study. We issue a word of caution particularly when efforts are underway to divide African-American men from African-American women. American racism today is much more pervasive and institutionalized and we must always have our antennas up to be able to perceive what the causative factors are to the social condition of oppressed communities in this nation. There has been an overall attack on African-Americans during the Reagan years. Whether this attack will continue effectively during the Bush years remains to be seen. Yet the handwriting is on the wall. We must not allow African-American men to be systematically excluded from higher education.

students. By 1986, however, while the total enrollment in higher education increased, the total African-American enrollment had declined by more than 30,000 students. Indeed, although during this period the total enrollment of African-American women slightly increased, the total enrollment of African-American men decreased.

Dr. William Julius Wilson, the noted professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, has concluded that the growing gap between African-American men and women on college campuses will create social problems in the future. In an interview with the New York Times, Dr. Wilson

conscious remedies in general." What is particularly disturbing about this decision is that it ignores the wisdom of past rulings, upholding race conscious remedies and the fact that every administration until Reagan supported and strengthened this remedy. In the last eight years there has been a constant battle with conservatives in the Justice Department who have attempted to weaken civil rights laws. Instead of enforcing civil rights laws they thought to subvert them.

This ruling further indicates how a president can shape the politics of the Supreme Court. Carter never had a chance to appoint even one justice to the high court. Reagan appointed three and promoted another to Chief Justice. Who knows what opportunity President Bush will have. These decisions are not something that reflect policy over the course of an administration, but are far reaching in their impact over the course of decades.

It is important to note that this ruling did not strike down minority set-aside programs in general, nor were they ruled unconstitutional. Furthermore, the ruling does not say that a state and local jurisdiction can't establish set-aside programs. However, even though this is a narrowly drawn decision, it still constitutes an attack on a program which has helped achieve a level of justice and equity in our society. Unfortunately, this ruling regarding set-asides, along with other efforts during this past administration to

weaken affirmative action, have come at a time when we are seeing the first fruitful benefits of its implementation. Blacks, women and other minorities have obtained jobs in a number of trades that were previously closed to them. Between 1972 and 1979, for example, the percentage of black electricians rose from 3.2 percent to 5.6 percent. In public service professions, such as police officers, there have been even greater increases. Employers have noted that their work forces have improved as a result of affirmative action.

Someday we may reach the desired state through improved education training and health programs where affirmative action, always consider to be a transitional program, will no longer be necessary. But we are not there yet. The poverty rate for minorities has in fact increased in this decade, and racial equality remains an elusive dream for many.

Paraphrasing Lyndon Johnson: you do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying, "Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please." You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and then say: "You are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.

Affirmative action is a remedy which works.

### What's On Your Mind?

Let us hear your comments, ideas and opinions. Write to:

Letters To The Post  
P.O. Box 30144  
Charlotte, NC 28230

Please include name, address and phone number. We edit letters for clarity and grammar.

# What To Do With Reagan's High Court?

By Gwenevere Daye Davis  
Guest Editorial

Taken at its face value alone, the Supreme Court's recent affirmative action decision could be viewed as a setback for blacks and other minorities in this country. But upon closer scrutiny, one could more accurately conclude that it is a by-product of the right-wing conservative trend Reagan established while in office -- a lasting legacy that will affect us well into the next century.

Reagan was successful in turning the tide of American history by appointing three Supreme Court justices, the threshold he needed to tilt the judicial scales in his ideological favor. Since his Supreme Court appointees are relatively young and will hold their positions for life, it is safe to say that we are in for a long ride on the conservative bandwagon.

But will this be an enjoyable ride? Or will it result in some judicial decisions that will not only be unpopular, but will, in fact, have a very negative impact on our society?

After all, the whole conservative strategy is to take us back to the days when we felt good about ourselves, God and country; when we were strong as a nation, had high morals, good schools and loads of patriotism.

While there were some aspects about the 1940s and 1950s which were positive, there were also many negatives about that era. Power was in the hands of a few, people did not have the freedom to be different, and bigotry was an accepted facet of American life.

A major flaw with the far-right, conservative strategy is that it fails to recognize the realities which existed during and since that "feel good" era.

Reagan, the great communicator, successfully perpetuated the attitude of returning to the "good old days" throughout his tenure in office. In many ways, he lived in the fantasies of the past, as demonstrated by his numerous, wistful references to "winning one for the Gipper." He, in turn, selected like-minded justices, who also are out of touch with the myriad of realities we face as

we approach the 21st century.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, in her opinion on the Richmond, Va., affirmative action case, is clearly out of touch with the challenges which minority business owners face in doing business with the public and private sectors.

For example, in describing conditions that existed in Richmond, Va., which may be the cause for the wide disparity between the percentage of the city's black population (50 percent) versus its corresponding percentage of construction contracts (one percent), she contends: "There are numerous explanations for this dearth in minority participation, including past societal discrimination in education and economic opportunities as well as both black and white career and entrepreneurial choices. Blacks may be disproportionately attracted to industries other than construction."

This "disproportionate attraction" is due to the fact that blacks have not been allowed the same career choices as whites, and are in many ways restricted in the depth and breadth of their career choices, largely due to discrimination.

All the empirical evidence, from birth until death, supports this argument: "Blacks have lower birth weights, higher infant mortality, higher dropout rates, lower college entrance rates, lower wages, less career advancement (even with the same educational achievement), more difficulty financing loans, and shorter life spans. America, for all its virtues, has yet to include being color-blind among them."

Justice O'Connor, from her narrow perspective, blames the victim, rather than the perpetrator, for the crime. Utilizing her deductive reasoning, one could conclude that black infants have higher mortality rates because they do not have as great a desire to live. Her entire argument lacks not only common sense, but a sense of morality, as its basis, and also magnifies her insensitivity to this entire issue.

Justice O'Connor is right when she says, "A solution to the first

problem that aggravates the second is no solution at all." But she is wrong if she believes we can relieve past and present injustices by pretending that they never existed.

While proponents of this first of many decisions by our new, conservative Supreme Court may be applauding for the time being, they may be deeply troubled if they consider where this new-found conservatism will lead.

Roel versus Wade, which is as much about women's rights as individual freedom, is about to be overturned. Then what will be next? There will be no more "sacred cows"--everything will be on the table for scrutiny and examination.

How many additional court cases affecting inclusion of all groups at every level of American society will be overturned? How many of our personal freedoms will be infringed upon? Will we return to the days of McCarthyism, exclusion, segregated schools, and public displays of bigotry and hatred? A better question may be: Can we afford to return to those days?

America has challenges before it which do not allow us the luxury of living in the past. Whether we like it or not, we are rapidly becoming a more heterogeneous, rather than an homogeneous, society. Sustaining our global competitive position requires that we devise a method of including all racial, ethnic and gender groups in all levels of society--not be intent upon herding the, into the ranks of the underclass.

Since it appears that we are stuck with the Supreme Court Reagan has devised for the next 30 years, our only hope is that the Executive and Legislative branches of the federal government will employ leadership and implement policies which address America's while taking into account its past and present. Our children's destiny deserves and demands a broader perspective.

Ms. Davis, based in Houston, Texas, is publisher/editor of the monthly newsletter National Minority Politics.