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EDITORIALS

A Call To Arms

By HOYLE H. MARTIN
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Last January 26 we quoted Julius Chambers, head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, as saying, "There is compelling evidence the public is ready to get on with attending to many of the race relations issues." Our reaction to this statement was that we were not so sure that we shared Mr. Chambers' optimism because of the conclusions of the report called "Quiet Riots - 20 Years After the Kerner (Civil Disorder, 1968) Report." The new report, released in March 1988, says that "quiet riots" are now tearing the nation apart in the form of joblessness, poverty, housing and school discrimination and crime. The 200-page report says, "These quiet riots (think of Miami that got loud) are not as noticeable to outsiders ... but they are more destructive of human life than the violent riots of 20 years ago."

Therefore, we were not surprised when Mr. Chambers told a group of about 500 people at Friendship Baptist Church here in Charlotte on June 28 that, "I came to sound an alarm, to call you to arms. We face a serious challenge." Chambers added that the challenge we face is to counter-attack the policies of the eight-year Reagan administration and the recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority that aims to erode the civil rights gains of the 1960s and 1970s.

Furthermore, Chambers said the two-term Reagan presidency was characterized by undermining and criticizing school busing and referring to Charlotte's relatively successful busing plans as an "aberration." Similarly, Reagan spread the idea that affirmation was bad because it was unfair to and hurt white males. Such actions by the nation's highest political office had two re-

sults. First, as Chambers eloquently said, "the advent of the Reagan administration ... slowly helped us to appreciate how tenuous these advances (civil rights) were."

Secondly, the high court's conservative majority severely weakened the civil rights gains of the 60s and 70s by narrowing the scope of civil rights protection for minorities and leaving in the minds of the employers, who are usually white, and their white male workers that court remedies for job discrimination was unfair to them. Similarly, the court made it more difficult for minorities and women to prove job discrimination and easier for white men to challenge job preferences for minorities and women. Also, state and local governments will have more difficulty in so-called "set-aside" contracts for minority-owned businesses. In summary, Chambers concluded, "We no longer have a reliable Supreme Court" where civil rights are concerned.

Mr Chambers' call to arms was, among other things, an attempt to remind his audience that all is not lost since some members of Congress are planning to introduce new civil rights legislation to ease the pain of the high court's action. This means too that supporters of civil rights must be prepared to use the ballot box at election time to support their concerns.

Implied in Chambers' call for arms is the realization that the quiet riots could become noisy like they were in the 1960s. In order to assure that this does not happen we simply must all make commitments to protect every American's civil rights as guaranteed under the Constitution. To do less would be to fall in our commitments to ourselves, our families, our neighbors and the nation we profess to love and respect.

Doing The Right Thing

In the "Cosby Show" the Huxtable family, an upper middle class, black family is portrayed as having all the luxuries of life that any American family would normally desire. Therefore, the TV show sends a three-fold message to both its black and white viewing audiences, that is, America is truly the land of opportunity for all regardless of race or religion, education is a key to success (Mr. Huxtable is a medical doctor and Mrs. Huxtable is a lawyer, both very successful, and white people are relieved of any sense of racial guilt about black people.

Now, along comes Spike Lee's movie "Do the Right Thing" which upsets many people, both black and white, because it climaxes in a horrifying burst of violence on a typical hot summer day in Brooklyn, New York, the police are shown as villains, and the movie's dialogue is laced with thought-provoking viewpoints that are threatening to some.

While such scenes are stereotypical of what many white people believe about blacks while they fail to use their minds to understand the source and causes of such behavior. Similarly, many white people who saw the movie were equally perplexed by the absence of any rapes or drugs, garbage in the street, or mothers abusing their children.

These, what some would call paradoxical perceptions of life in the black ghetto, have led to Spike Lee being praised for his artistic approach but criticized by others for what some have called his fanning the flames of racism and hatred.

Lee's reaction to all of this has been in his youthful but characteristic manner by saying that he is simply bringing racism back as a priority agenda item where it ought to be. While upsetting some with the film's violence, we forget that it allows an opportunity to think about, analyze and study how to prevent a real life riot and hopefully improve race relations.

It appears clear to me that Spike Lee is not the complex, black radical film producer that many whites would perceive him to be. Lee says, "That the difference is between the way a white director would have made it (the film) and the way I made it." It is for the same reason that he said, "I don't think major studios are comfortable with me, and I don't think I want them to be, altogether."

Lee, as a writer-director-producer-actor, is somewhat unique for this reason, too. Yet, as long as he produces films to force people to see the world as it really is and not just how we want it to be, he will forever be "Doing the Right Thing."

Will Year 2000 End Civil Rights Fight?

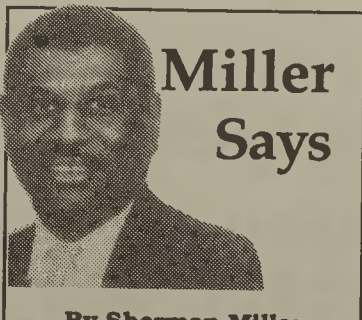
I was looking out the window in a Delaware barber shop in early May when I noticed an interracial couple. I commented to my barber that whites are moving into the heart of the black community. He responded, "Whites will have to take the lead on integration because blacks are too racist." The barber's comment suggested that I ought to look closer at who is driving integration today.

Let me address this leadership issue by highlighting some attitudinal changes in housing rentals and ownership in Wilmington, Delaware. Wilmington is an affluent city with a bright future because of the rapid growth of the financial industry in Delaware. I have personally experienced Wilmington's racial attitude changes.

Twenty-five years ago my wife and I tried to rent an apartment in a white section of Wilmington. We still remember a black utility man bouncing down the stairs, saying, "They don't rent to colored people."

We then witnessed a white exodus from Wilmington. It preserved segregation a few more years in the suburbs.

A similar white exodus nationally offered some unscrupulous real estate companies across America a golden opportunity to



Miller Says

By Sherman Miller

reap a bounty from America's segregationist psyche. "Block busting" (placing black families in white neighborhoods as a catalyst for white flight) became a reality.

There was a racist belief that black people would drive down the value of neighborhood homes because their properties would rapidly deteriorate. Many whites gave up good, urban homes, with low mortgages, to become "house poor" in the suburbs where they could only afford an empty house.

Many urban areas across the United States of America became laden with black Americans. Then, blacks looked up one day and saw the white suburban mirage. Blacks then pursued dream homes in the suburbs.

The irony in this national tale is that many sections of Wilmington did not go down when blacks moved into white neighborhoods.

In recent years, the cost of suburban housing has risen too high for many young white families. Urban houses, on the other hand, are a bargain, regardless of who lives next door. Many young whites have grown up in an integrated society, so being near blacks is no major crisis.

Thus, this white invasion into black bastions has caused many Wilmington blacks to privately express concern over young, white families taking back the starter homes.

The only real hurt in this story is that many blacks who left the city for depressed, suburban neighborhoods probably could not afford to repurchase the homes in their former neighborhoods.

The above tale suggests that the civil rights organizations are no longer the drivers of integration. Economics now has become the catalyst that is destroying racism of the heart. Does this portend that by the year 2000 the black leadership will finally have to declare that the civil rights struggle is over?

What's In A Flag?

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

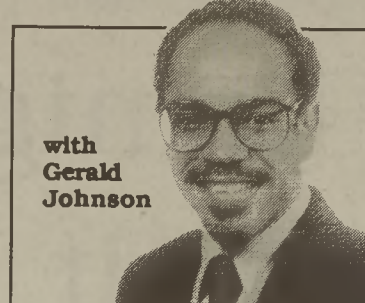
The uproar over the burning of the flag indicates how misplaced this country's values have become. Clearly, to invoke laws to protect the flag as a symbol would destroy the very meaning of what it supposedly symbolizes.

We have become so materialistic as a society that we place more emphasis on symbols than on meaning. Unfortunately, politicians hop on the symbolic bandwagon to take advantage of an ill-informed public.

But how about this for irony. We are more upset about burning the flag than we are about taking the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag out of some school systems. We can't burn the symbol because it is unpatriotic, but we can stop the public ritual of pledging allegiance to it because it loses its significance.

How about "...one nation under God". This country was founded on strong religious beliefs. Our forefathers felt so strongly about religious freedoms, they included strong language to guarantee that it be preserved.

The spirit of the preservation of yesteryear has given way to the letter of the law of recent times. Consequently, the symbolism of prayer in schools and other public places has been stopped to protect the freedoms



with Gerald Johnson

As I See It

of those who have no belief in a God.

Let's not leave out "...liberty and justice for all". The struggle for equality in this country is a never-ending battle. For certain populations of our society this phrase has very little meaning when it comes to practicing what you preach. We have yet to live up to being a society that offers liberty and justice for all. We may never live up to it.

Hence, the letter of the law (strictly following the wording of the constitution) has shaken the very spirit the country was founded on.

Our allegiance to symbols should be on how we uphold the principals the symbol represents. If we are sincere in doing this, then abusing the symbol is of little significance.

Sears Move A Hoax?

There was a lot of talk about Sears moving to Charlotte. However, Sears opted to remain in Chicago after receiving some tax

amenities from that fair city. But throughout the negotiations of luring a major corporation to Charlotte, I had serious concerns.

Where were the employees going to come from? According to the word on the street, Sears was not relocating the bulk of their Chicago staff. If that was the case, then who were they going to hire. With an unemployment rate less than 3 percent in Charlotte, getting skilled labor would be next to impossible.

How could we afford to escalate road improvements for the southeast part of town for this relocation? It was stated that road improvements could be escalated to accommodate the move. This I don't understand. Why can't that same magic be applied now?

The threat of a move by Sears got Chicago to do what it did, give Sears a reason to stay in one of the heaviest taxed cities in the nation.

Charlotte gained a lot of national attention by Sears considering it as one of the prime spots to relocate. Other companies thinking of relocation will give Charlotte a close look.

Even though both Sears and Charlotte got a lot out of the deal, the marriage of the two doesn't seem practical at this time. It definitely makes one wonder if either were that serious about the whole deal.

Could it be that both parties realized what could be gained by planning this hoax, and they both got what they went after? Who knows, but it is an intriguing thought.



Is Democratic Party Losing Minorities?

In 1956, black Americans voted Republican by roughly 60-40; in 1960, they voted Democratic by about 70-30, and they have voted shift in party allegiance, but the one most often given revolves around President John F. Kennedy's visible concern for the problems black citizens experienced during the Civil Rights Movement.

Since that election in 1960, Democrats have been able to rely on black votes in local, state and national elections, to the point of taking those votes for granted. Many black elected officials were vocal about being snubbed by party leaders during last year's presidential campaign season.

Perhaps this allegiance is due to the perception in most recent years of the Democratic Party being the "party of the little guy." Since a disproportionate amount of black and Hispanic voters falls into the category of the disadvantaged--they represent 20 percent of the population, but 40 percent of the poor--the Democratic Party may have been a natural haven for them.

Over the past 20 years, however, there has been a significant movement of minority voters into the ranks of the middle class. This movement can be attributed, in large measure, to the success of social programs and equal opportunity that the appreciation of black and Hispanic voters to the Democratic Party for its support of these programs in the past, will be enough to retain their votes.

Carmen Perce, vice chair of the Democratic National Committee, believes that minority voters will "not easily forget that the legislation which helped them and theirs was developed by the Democratic Party."

However, the needs of minority voters may have changed as they have moved into the mainstream. Their needs may have

National Minority Politics

by Gweneveve Daye Davis



become similar to those of white middle class voters who are primarily concerned with good schools, clean quiet neighborhoods, low taxes and more opportunities for upward mobility. In this regard, Democrats may have difficulty retaining these once "sure-thing" voters.

Some experts agree. William Julius Wilson, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, believes the party needs to develop new policies to fight inequality that go beyond court ordered busing, affirmative action programs and anti-discrimination lawsuits. By stressing coalition politics and race-blind programs, such as full-employment policies, job skills training, comprehensive health care legislation, educational reforms in the public schools, child-care legislation and crime and drug abuse prevention programs, Wilson thinks the Democrats could be in a strong position for the 1992 presidential election.

Ronald H. Brown, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, believes the Democratic Party is the perfect place to combat racial differences, to bridge gaps that exist due to race, region, religion and ethnicity. He proclaimed in his acceptance speech as DNC chair in February, that for the Democrats, strength lies in diversity.

This diversity, however, brings with it a certain degree of adversity. Bringing blacks, browns and the white working class together, along with white liberals, has not been easy. With such a heterogeneous group, it is often difficult to satisfy the needs of everyone. Minority voters feel that not enough has been done, while white voters feel too much has been done.

In fact, a study commissioned by former DNC Chairman Paul Kirk in 1985 concluded that white middle-class voters felt "the Democratic Party has not stood with them as they moved from the working class to the middle class. They have a whole set of middle-class economic problems today, and their party is not helping them. Instead, it is helping the blacks, Hispanics and the poor. They feel betrayed."

What will it take for the Democrats to retain minority voters? To a large degree, the Democratic Party will continue to receive the lion's share of minority votes for the next several years. Historical voting habits and the lack of a compelling reason for change, or even a compelling reason to consider change, will assure the party of that with a miniscule effort on its part.

However, unless Democrats come up with better reasons for upwardly mobile minority voters, particularly those in the 18 to 40 age group, to remain Democrats (other than "do it because your parents did it"), they will see further slippage in that area to the GOP. More than likely this will not be more than 5 to 10 percentage points over the next four years. But that could be enough to change the outcome of close elections.

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