

Black conservative defines American Dream

By Rep. J.C. Watts

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When it comes to the American dream, no one has a corner on the market. All of us have an equal chance to share in that dream. I never thought I would have the privilege of addressing the American people, but this is America where dreams still come true...

People are dying to get into this country... not out of it. It is still the greatest, most prosperous, most powerful nation on the face of the earth and it produces hundreds of thousands of dreams-come-true every day... This past year, I had the opportunity to travel the country and meet the people who are changing lives, one heart at a time... These people working in the trenches and suffering with those who suffer, understand compassion. They understand compassion can't be dispensed from a safe distance by a faceless bureaucrat sitting in an air conditioned office in Washington, D.C....

We [Republicans] don't define compassion by how many people are on welfare, or AFDC, or living in public housing. We define compassion by how few people are on welfare, AFDC, and [in] public housing, because we have given them the means to climb the ladder of success.... Compassion can't be measured in dollars and cents. It does come with a price tag, but that price tag isn't the

amount of money spent. The price tag is love - being able to see people as they can be and not as they are. The measure of a man is not how great his faith is, but how great his love is. We must not let government programs disconnect our souls from each other... Bob Dole understands Washington can't teach people right from wrong, dry their tears, or help a child with his homework. Bob Dole understands it's people helping people, neighbor helping neighbor... there is one title I cherish a great deal more than congressman and that is the title of Dad.



Watts

So, indulge me while I say a word to the kids... Young people, America needs you. If our country is going to continue to be great, if it is going to continue to be strong, you are going to have to do your part. You are going to have to fight for America. Fight against skipping school and cheating on your papers. Fight against driving too fast and disobeying your parents. Fight against cursing and smoking. And fight, fight with every fiber of your being against drugs and alcohol.

I know, I know. You've heard all of this before and you probably think that J.C. Watts is just another old fashioned grown-up and if you're thinking that, you're right. Just ask my five kids - Keisha, Jerrelle, Jennifer, Trey,

and Julie. I know it's tough. That's why I'm asking you to fight and be counted as a leader. You can help your friends find the courage to say no to the things that make them weak. And yes to the things that make them strong. You see, character does count. For too long we have gotten by in a society that says the only thing right is to get by and the only thing wrong is to get caught. Character is doing what's right when nobody is looking...

Parents and adults, I don't just challenge the youth. I challenge you. For what we build and nourish and encourage in our youth today, is what our country will look like 20 years from now. The American Dream is about becoming the best you can be. It's not about your bank account, the kind of car you drive, or the brand of clothes you wear. It's about using your gifts and abilities to be all that God meant for you to be.

Whether your dream is to be a doctor, teacher, engineer, or congressman. If you can dream it, you can do it. The American Dream is the promise that if you study hard, work hard, and dedicate yourself, you can be whatever you want to be... In my wildest imagination, I never thought that the fifth of six children born to Helen and Buddy Watts - in a poor black neighborhood, in the poor rural community of Eufaula, Oklahoma - would someday be called congressman. But then, this is America... where dreams come true.

Rep. J.C. WATTS is a Republican representing the Fourth District of Oklahoma. This was originally a speech delivered Aug. 13 at the Republican national convention.

Letters to The Post

Learn about us

When are we, as black people going to learn "it's OK" for our children to learn about their African culture? I applaud Anne Jenkins, a Winston-Salem teacher for her Afrocentric kindergarten class. Sad to say, her class is considered the first of its kind in North Carolina. To teach anything else to a classroom comprised of black children shouldn't be the norm.

As far as any whites who would be concerned with this type of class breeding anti-white behavior, are we to surmise that European history being taught throughout our lives has bred anti-black results. I would think intelligent well-informed whites would realize once a culture as rich as ours has been taught and understood, these children will always be "on top and not on the bottom." Is that the fear?

The student body at the school in Winston-Salem is 95 percent black per your reporting. This particular class was open to everyone and the teacher is following the state's guidelines, yet there are people who are sitting back watching to see if the class is going to work. Perhaps if those same people got off their chairs and invested time in this effort they could aid in the success. This program is already successful by the mere fact of these youth (at their age) probably having a better handle early on of their history than most of their parents. If this effort fails, (and I don't see how that could happen) those who could do, but didn't for fear of "rockin' the boat" have caused it to fail, not Ms. Jenkins' effort. On the other hand I would think the Black leaders alone in the Winston-Salem community have by now flooded Ms. Jenkins classroom to give her any support she needs.

We scarcely, if we do it at all, teach our children their heritage from their early years, yet spend our weekend time trying to educate them through African art, dance, etc. This sends them a mixed message of our historical importance, especially when we try to de-program them in February of being so knowledgeable of the European history they have been daily taught in class. Weekend programs are better than nothing at all, but wouldn't children fare better "growing up" with history.

According to the principal, Bobby Robinson, this class is an "experiment" for children to learn about their culture and who they are. By now we should be accustomed to experiments - remember the Tuskegee syphilis study - this one won't be such a bitter pill, hopefully! One of the discussion topics at The African American Male National Council Conference will be "Are separate school the solution for African American males? If you have read any current statistics about black youth (alone) or visited any management schools lately you would know we have nothing to lose at this point. On any given day, the black males who are school age and not in school would fill several classrooms. We would be wise to "experiment" turning a management school into one whereby they could learn a trade while learning their culture.

On Nov. 8, "A Slave Ship Speaks" will be on exhibition at Spirit Square. This may be the closest some of us will get, to an unearthed "reality check." The human cargo transported on that slave ship never had a choice after being transported here.

NORA CHAMBERS
Charlotte

What's on your mind?

Send your comments to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144, Charlotte, N.C. 28230 or fax (704) 342-2160. You can also use E-mail - charpost@clt.mind-spring.com.

All correspondence must include a daytime telephone number for verification.

Reviving America's progressive movement

Manning Marable



What approach should we take to revive the African-American and the progressive movements in the United States? What challenges and tasks are ahead as we confront the 1996 election?

Labor leaders, liberals and the civil rights community are already saying that our only political alternative is to endorse President Clinton and the Democratic Party. Certainly the election of Republican challenger Robert Dole would be a disaster for black people. Remember Dole's refusal to speak at the NAACP's annual convention this summer, sneering that Kweisi Mfume was "Trying to set me up." Yet if we follow a strategy which focuses solely on the presidential campaign, we will limit our effectiveness in changing the parameters of American politics. We should approach electoral politics from the vantage point of

building movements for social justice. We need to enhance the organizational capacity and effectiveness of institutions which are sites for democratic resistance and grass roots mobilization.

There are four key components in this strategy for progressive political change: building institutions which empower working class and poor people; initiating protests involving civil disobedience and direct action; supporting independent political activities and organizations; and isolating and defeating the right.

It is absolutely clear that the Far Right deliberately manipulates racism as a tool to polarize voters. Many of the issues which will define the 1996 election - affirmative action, minority scholarships at universities, majority minority legislative districts, Proposition 187 - all involve race. Yet black people must become more active in building movements that bring people from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds to fight for common concerns. Problems like poverty, inade-

quate housing and health care don't have a solution that applies solely to one race. Especially in urban centers, we need to support and strengthen institutions which advocate the interest of working and poor people.

Two types of these institutions are labor unions and community-based organizations. With new national leadership the AFL-CIO is attempting to reverse decades of decline. Throughout the country, unions are making new efforts in organizing low wage workers, who are disproportionately Latino and black. Community-based organizations are active in a whole range of activities, from struggles around public transportation to environmental racism. The most dynamic forms of democratic resistance occur when labor and community groups collaborate with each other. In Chicago, ACORN and SEIU local 880 have initiated a "Chicago Jobs and Living Wage Campaign," which includes 60 union locals, community and church groups. When ACORN organized 200 home care work-

ers in Chicago, that mobilization sparked the development of an SEIU local that has over 11,000 members.

Second, we should revive many of the protest tactics of civil disobedience and nonviolence to confront our opponents. We will recall that in the 1950s and 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Civil Rights organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congress of Racial Equality used passive resistance as an effective protest technique to challenge segregation. Today's barrier of color and class, however, is social inequality, challenged by struggles for a living wage, employment, universal health care, education and housing. The nation has moved rapidly toward greater socioeconomic inequality, reducing the wages of millions of families, as social programs have been slashed. Progressives and activists can make the case that the growing divisions of race, class and gender, the decline of real wages and the destruction of social services create the conditions for a nonviolent resis-

stance movement.

One model is provided by the struggles surrounding a newspaper strike in Detroit. Weekly blockades of the newspaper's headquarters have led to over 300 arrests, including public officials, feminists, anti-racist activists and religious leaders. As the anti-apartheid struggle a decade ago illustrated, people from various classes and races can be inspired and mobilized if the cause is just and if the target for active resistance is clear.

Third, progressives must emphasize creative and independent activism inside the electoral arena. This includes support for independent movements like the New Party which are running candidates in local races. More importantly, an innovative approach to electoralism is represented by ACORN's "living wage" referendum campaigns. We must support efforts to move our electoral system toward proportional representation.

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Newest U.S. business is prison industry complex

Bernice P. Jackson



Twice within a few days I heard a new term which sent chills down my spine.

The term was "prison industrial complex." It signaled the recognition of the fact that our economy has gone through one more dramatic change - from the post-World War II military industrial complex referred to by President Eisenhower to the present day when prisons are the growth industry. We've gone from a nation which builds missiles to one which builds pris-

ons.

The first time I heard the term was in a National Public Radio story about Dannemora, N.Y. which houses a large prison. The prison is the town's largest employer and it is the only place many of the guards have ever encountered black or Hispanic men and their racism is evident. Many of the businesses in the town are dependent on the guards and prison employees and the wives and mothers who come to visit the prisoners. Without the prison, many people in Dannemora would be out of work.

Prison business is big business in America and not just in Dannemora. Millions of dollars are spent each year in building more prisons. Millions of dollars are spent in purchasing uniforms,

linens, beds, paper and other products. Tens of millions are spent on salaries of guards, counselors, doctors and nurses and prison administrators.

The prison industry is a growth industry, so much so that private corporations have entered the business.

One of the most frightening aspects of the prison industry is that the majority of those incarcerated are people of color. The majority of those working in the industry are not.

And then there is death row. As of fall, 1995 there were 3,045 inmates sitting on death rows in the United States. Over half of them are people of color. Just about all of them are poor.

Most death row inmates are represented by court-appointed

attorneys. In many jurisdictions there are no requirements of proficiency and experience for such attorneys even though capital cases are extremely complex. The court-appointed attorney must ask for funds from the court each time experts in pathology, ballistics, substance abuse and mental health are used. There are very limited funds available for private investigation.

A recent study by the American Friends Service Committee on Native Americans on death row found that in over 70 percent of the cases, native Americans on death row had been substance abusers and that this substance abuse was a controlling part of the inmates life before he com-

mitted the crime. Too often such factors are not taken into account by prosecutors or juries.

What does it mean that we have chosen to invest in prisons rather than in education and prevention for tens of thousands of our young people? What does it mean for a democracy that one of its fastest growing industries is one which imprisons over a million citizens? What does it mean that people of color are overrepresented in the prison population and especially, on death row? What does it mean for us all when we have coined a new phrase - the prison industrial complex?

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The genocide coverup and crack cocaine in America

By Conrad Worrill
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The San Jose Mercury News series on the CIA involvement in cocaine distribution to the Crips and Bloods in Los Angeles, in which the profits were used to finance the CIA backed contra army in Nicaragua, has caused quite a stir in the African community in America.

This series appeared in mid-August and was authored by Mercury News staff writer Gary Webb. Through the Final Call newspaper, the series was revealed in its Sept. 3 issue.

Reps. Maxine Waters, the Rev Jesse Jackson and a host of

African leaders in America have demanded the CIA be investigated. The response by the CIA, through its director, John Deutch, have attempted, thus far, to cover up and deny any knowledge of CIA involvement in this affair. The Justice Department, through Attorney General Janet Reno, has taken the same position.

Most of the major white newspapers, radio and television stations have refused to address the revelations of the Mercury

News series. However, the African oriented and owned media outlets have taken the lead in presenting the facts of this series to the public. Gary Webb, Congresswoman Maxine

Waters, Rev Jesse Jackson and others have appeared on several TV and radio shows discussing the impact of this issue.

Just like the response from the verdict rendered in the O.J. Simpson trial where most Africans in America agreed with the not guilty verdict and most white people were angered, and outraged, we can observe a similar response to the Mercury News series.

African people in America believe the facts of this case and most white people don't. White people don't want to believe that their government, through the CIA, "sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs of Los Angeles and funneled mil-

lions in drug profits to a Latin American guerrilla army ran by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency." African people - America witness on a daily basis the impact of negative government policies on our lives.

Therefore, the Mercury News series only reinforced what most African people in this country have been discussing for years in terms of the government's role in the drug epidemic and its impact on African people.

Clearly, throughout African peoples sojourn in America, evidences of government practices of genocide being practiced against us has been revealed time and time again. Most

notably, the practice of genocide was uncovered when Paul Robeson led a delegation to the United Nations in 1951 to present the historic Petition for relief from the crime of genocide by the United States government.

Of course the United States government denied this charge, just as they are denying their involvement in the CIA, contra and street organizations distribution and selling of drugs to African communities throughout the country as revealed in the San Jose Mercury News series.

CONRAD WORRILL is chairman of the National Black United Front in Chicago.