

Why blacks don't vote Republican

THE SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR INSTITUTE FOR CHILD ADVOCACY MINISTRY

By Marian Wright Edelman

In many religious congregations, summer is a traditional time for hosting a Vacation Bible School, and every year children from the congregation and community look forward to these traditional weeks of sharing fellowship, faith, and fun. Every July for the last twelve years, the Children's Defense Fund's Haley Farm in Clinton, Tenn. has hosted its own kind of summer school for faithful adults who work with and for children: our Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry. The Proctor Institute is similar to the summer sessions offered at many seminaries, but it provides something to few seminaries do: theological, biblical, and practical grounding on child advocacy as a ministry of the Church. Here, religious leaders, seminarians, Christian educators, and other faith-based advocates for children come together for five days of spiritual renewal, networking, movement building workshops, and continuing education about children's needs.

Haley Farm is the spiritual, intellectual, and leadership development home for the 21st century children's movement. Those who gather for the Proctor Institute have the chance to explore how their faith relates to justice and children; hear inspiring preaching about children's concerns; gain accurate, up-to-date information on children's needs; and participate in workshops to acquire new skills, best practices, and strategies to implement programs to help children and strengthen families in their own congregations and communities.

All of this takes place in an idyllic setting, on the Tennessee farm that once belonged to Roots author Alex Haley. The rustic cabins that Mr. Haley and his friends and family used are still there, and they have been joined by beautiful additions like the Langston Hughes Library and the Riggio-Lynch Chapel, both designed by Maya Lin. The Chapel's simple, soaring shape evokes the ark of protection, the fishermen's boats that figured in Jesus' ministry, and the small boat drawn by seven-year-old Maria Coté featured in the Children's Defense Fund's logo.

People come to the Proctor Institute prepared to workshop, fellowship, learn, and be equipped and inspired for action when they return home. Our sessions this year will include morning devotions led by the Revs. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. and Otis Moss III; Bible studies by Dr. Fred Craddock; plenary discussions on urgent children's concerns; and workshops on everything from how congregations can provide tax clinics for low-income families to how congregations can work to reduce violence in their communities. Many of this year's workshops focus on two special emphases: how people of faith can build a united voice to ensure every uninsured child health care, and how we can work together to stop the Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis that is destroying the hopes and futures of so many poor and minority children.

Other workshops will help participants learn how their congregations can work with CDF to sponsor Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools sites and provide positive alternatives for children during summer and after-school hours, or how they can use our resources to plan National Observance of Children's Sabbaths activities in their congregations and communities. Throughout the week, several hundred young leaders from CDF's youth development networks will also be attending a Young Adult Leaders Training. They will participate in the Proctor plenaries, and give participants a chance to hear their perspective about the breakdown of parental and elder responsibility for children and how they believe adults and faith communities can better fulfill their responsibilities to the next generation. Noted historian Howard Zinn and Ruby Bridges, who at age six desegregated the New Orleans public schools, will be among the speakers at the young leaders' training.

A highlight of each year's Proctor Institute is our Great Preachers Series, where each night a different minister offers a prophetic word about how we can faithfully serve children. This year's preachers include the Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams, the Senior Pastor of Morningside Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, the Rev. Dr. William S. Epps, Senior Pastor of Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, the Rev. Dr. James Forbes, Jr., Senior Minister of The Riverside Church in New York City, and the Rev. Dr. Eileen W. Lindner, Deputy General Secretary for Research and Planning at the National Council of Churches USA, who is concluding her three-month service at Haley as the Riggio-Lynch Chapel's inaugural Dean.

The people of faith who join us each year at the Proctor Institute may come tired, depleted, or even discouraged by the challenges of so many competing needs in their congregations, their communities, and our country and world. But they leave renewed and restored, with the words of great preachers and singing ringing in their ears, with new hope and inspiration, new passion and commitment bring-



RON WALTERS

Phony leaders exploit phony issues

I didn't notice the insult at first. During the week that President Bush and his congressional colleagues declared my family to be the nation's most pressing problem, I was too busy trying to end the AIDS epidemic to pay much attention.

Their timing was classic. It was the first week of June, a week in which we marked the 25th anniversary of the first AIDS diagnosis. So I had joined an unprecedented coalition of national Black leaders—from politicians to celebrities—in calling the community to action against AIDS. That was my priority: Saving lives.

As the late Coretta Scott King once said, "Anyone who sincerely cares about the future of Black America had better be speaking out about AIDS." Washington, alas, had other priorities.

The White House and its congressional emissaries paid no attention to the June 5 call to action. What preoccupied them? Healthcare for all, you ask? Rebuilding New Orleans? Trying to figure out how to reduce the price of gas or bring our soldiers home from Iraq? It was none of those things.

Instead, they wanted to link into the Constitution a ban on gay marriage—a triple redundancy, given that a 1996 federal law already does just that and only one state in the nation issues same-sex marriage licenses. The Senate nevertheless leapt into action and, voting largely along party-lines, the august body chose to leave the Constitution as it is, for now.

Now, I'm trying to figure this out. American soldiers are dying every day in Iraq. Interest rates are going up, property values are going down. Students in California and other states can't pass their exit exams. "No Child Left Behind" has become "no child left." Nearly a year after Hurricane Katrina, most of the residents of New Orleans still can't go home. Half a million Americans are dead from AIDS. And the most pressing issue for the "leader of the free world" is denying gay and lesbian families equal protection under the law? How can that be?

As the Bush administration and Senate Republicans pondered to their political base last month, the Ryan White CARE Act lingered untouched on the congressional workbench. The CARE Act funds treatment and care for low-income people with HIV/AIDS around the country. Congress was required to reauthorize the Act last year, but hasn't gotten around to it yet. Too busy with other priorities, it seems.

Of course, even if Congress reauthorizes the CARE Act, the White House has for years urged lawmakers not to give the program any real new funds. Today, with an estimated 40,000 new infections every year and more Americans living with HIV/AIDS than ever, the CARE Act remains at largely the same funding level it had in 2001—five years and 200,000 new infections ago.

For the AIDS epidemic's first eight years, America's leaders similarly chose other priorities over AIDS. President Reagan didn't bother to even discuss the subject publicly until 1987.

Our politicians' willingness to dismiss the carnage back then, because it appeared to largely plague gay men, gave HIV the space it needed to take root. Those roots now stretch into every part of our society, particularly Black society. Nearly 70 percent of the new HIV/AIDS cases among women are Black and nearly half of Black gay and bisexual men in some of our urban cities already are infected.

Maybe it's just a question of priorities. Perhaps the 54 percent of annual new infections that are Black register no greater import to today's leaders than the infections among gay and bisexual men did to those of the Reagan era.

Those infections are, however, a priority to me. As are all of the estimated 1 million Americans living with HIV—a quarter to a third of whom don't know they are infected—and roughly half of whom are Black.

And now, having decided on my own priorities and taken note of how out of step they are with those of my political leaders, I'm finally insulted by the spectacle Washington created in the first week of June. The question for me and for those who share my desire to end this plague is: What will we do about the jarring misalignment of values?

If we learned nothing from Hurricane Katrina, we should have learned this: They are not going to send the boats or the buses for us in time. AIDS in America today is a Black disease. There is no getting around it. It's also painfully obvious that we can't wait for our political leaders to save us from that fact.

So perhaps we should remind Washington of Thomas Payne's famous plea: Lead, follow or get out of the way. Right now, too many of our elected officials of all political stripes are just plain in the way. It's up to us to move them.

PHILL WILSON is CEO and founder of the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles. He has participated in numerous international conferences on AIDS and was selected by the Ford Foundation in 2001 as one of "Twenty Leaders for a Changing World." Wilson has been living with HIV for more than 25 years and with AIDS for 15 years. He can be reached at Phillw@BlackAIDS.org.

Connect with The Post

Send letters to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144 Charlotte, NC 28230 or e-mail editorial@thecharlottepost.com. We edit for grammar, clarity and space. Include your name and daytime phone number.

Letters and photos will not be returned by mail unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Black-Latino rift? It doesn't exist here

Contrary to recent articles in The Charlotte Post and statements made by some of our community leaders, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg NAACP does not agree that a black-Latino rift exists in our community.

We recognize that tension may exist as the result of sub-minimal wages being paid to illegal immigrants and thereby displacing legal workers of all races that would otherwise be employed. This does not constitute a rift, it is a concern that most people understand must be addressed by a sensible, humane and workable immigration policy.

The NAACP has surveyed many in our community and has not been able to develop a consensus the two communities are at odds on this issue. African Americans and Latinos have shared the same neighborhoods for many years; separated from their wealthy and predominantly white neighbors by money, class, jobs and brick walls. They have worked side by side and competed in some cases for the same low paid / low skilled jobs to provide the necessities for a reasonable life for their families.

To blatantly express that a black-Latino rift exists in Charlotte reminds us of the hierarchical structure of slave ownership and supremacy, divide and conquer to maintain control.

When will some people come to appreciate that a community is made up of many different races, cultures, income levels, skills and abilities? When will we understand that every person has something to offer to make our community a better place for everyone? When will we understand and appreciate that diversity adds value to a workplace, a board room, a community meeting, a political process and a community?

We must not subscribe to the act of sharing a thought with a neighbor that a rift exists between blacks and Latinos in our city. We must subscribe to the effort to come together to better understand what life is like in the other persons shoes, regardless of their race or nationality.

The NAACP's stated position on immigration has called for Congress to enact a comprehensive immigration reform policy.

NAACP President and CEO Bruce S. Gordon said: "Our nation's immigration policy must be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect and dignity. We must move away from the politics of ostracizing immigrants and instead look at the demographic shifts and needs of our nation in a larger context."

Immigration affects all races and all segments of our community. It should not be an issue that is synonymous with Latino. Along with Latinos, we can include the immigration of native Africans, Haitians, Europeans, Middle Easterners and Asians to a long list of groups that have immigrated to our country for a better way of life. In that vein it is essential that all groups and all people are afforded the same opportunities and services provided by the tax dollars of each and every citizen in our community. Do not allow preferential treatment to create a rift that does not currently exist.

The city of Charlotte must embrace the differences that exist between all people and not support a dialogue that espouses a rift between African Americans and Latinos. This is a great opportunity for all Charlotteans to show that we are a united community regardless of race or nationality.

KENNETH WHITE is president of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg chapter of the NAACP.

When will some people come to appreciate that a community is made up of many different races, cultures, income levels, skills and abilities? When will we understand that every person has something to offer to make our community a better place for everyone?

