

Commentary

BLACK LEADERS OUT OF TOUCH WITH PEOPLE?

EDITOR'S NOTE: The writer of the article mentioned in this commentary, Thomas Sowell, a black, is a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and a member of President Reagan's Economic Policy Advisory Board. Read further responses on Dr. Sowell's article from Lubertha Johnson in next week's issue of the SENTINEL.

By Betty Brown

I hope you had a chance to read the article "Black Leaders" which was printed in the Las Vegas Review Journal. It was written by Thomas Sowell, L.A. Times/Washington Post, who is a member of President Reagan's Economic Policy Advisory Board. And with that in mind, all I can say is heaven help all us black folks, "black, brown and beige" and all the hues in between. Because while this man attacks what he calls the "light skinned elite," it is blatantly clear that he is a racist from his heart

and that all black people are expendable in his sight.

There are so many provocative, inflammatory remarks in this "epistle from the Pharisees" that it is difficult to know what aspect of it to address first.

Perhaps we should start by getting down to the basics of "color." I wonder if Thomas Sowell has been able to determine how "white" one has to be in order to be a member of the "black masses?" I've been under the impression all this time that any one who has (or rather, acknowledges) one drop of black blood in his veins is a "black." Until the civil rights acts were enacted, all "persons of color" were certainly treated that way (and often still are in spite of civil rights laws), regardless of their varying hues.

I surely would like to know where Thomas Sowell has gotten all of his information(?) and facts (??) about blacks

and their history. First of all, I would have to refute his notions of how some black people became lighter in color than others. His remarks would lead us to believe that all our light-skinned leaders' ancestors were "house niggers" or runaways who escaped to freedom in the North. What he failed to fully explain was WHY there were light skinned blacks — that some blacks were varying hues before they ever reached American soil. And even more importantly to this article, that slaves became "house niggers" and light skinned because most of them were either the children of the "master," who were born by the female slave field hands whom the master had visited in the shacks in the dead of night or pulled off into the bushes at the point of a whip or a gun, or were the female slaves themselves, whom he had moved into the house (most often against his wife's will) so that they would be more convenient for the satiation of his desires!

It is true that the house servants and freed slaves absorbed more of the white man's culture than did the field hands, due to their closer contact with the white man. But what is so unusual or noteworthy about that? After all, all rational people do know that blacks, even when in slavery, are human beings, capable of thinking and feeling and able to absorb that which they decide they want to absorb. What is the difference between their having absorbed the existing dominant culture of the time, and the Japanese, the Germans and multitudes of peoples of other cultures having done the same thing throughout the course of history? Even white people of varying races absorb the cultures of others, even blacks. Nowadays they wear dashikis and African jewelry, disco and spend millions of dollars on black music and consider "soul food" a delicacy! Why does this man "expect"

or "want" black people to be so different from any other people?

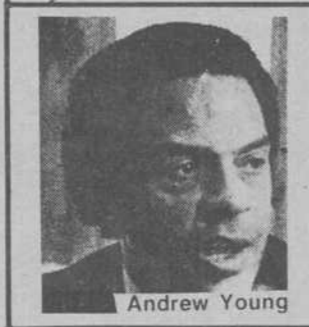
Now, let's talk about that "generations of snobbishness by the light skinned elite" business. It is certainly true that there is a history of color-based hostility within black society. However, it has its roots in the fact that, traditionally, as touched upon in the above paragraphs, white men have preferred to hire and associate with the "light skinned elite," rather than darker skinned blacks. This is perhaps understandable



Dr. W.E. DuBois



Adam C Powell



Andrew Young



Ben Hooks

"Black Elite?"

(though not condonable), since the "light skinned elite" is, after all, literally "a part of" the white man; so on a subliminal level it is perhaps easier for the white man to accept those who carry some of HIS blood in their veins. I wonder if Thomas Sowell can buy that premise. Thus, the white man originally brought about the chasm within the black society, by his discrimination of those within the black race who were darker in hue. As a result, some darker blacks began to resent lighter blacks and, yes, some lighter blacks began to misguidedly feel that they might be "better" than their darker brothers.

Now in recent years the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. Sowell accuses our "light skinned

"look" black enough, even though they had the best qualifications from a prospective group of employees. Thus, the white man has succeeded in deepening the breach within American black society. It is now the light skinned black's turn to resent and feel inferior to the darker black, because he is told that he isn't "black enough." However, all thinking blacks are beginning to understand and catch on to this phenomenon of reinforced snobbery and are rising above it. They are realizing that, in reality, to the white man "if you're black, you're black" and they know that they'd better begin to feel and conduct themselves in the same way. After all, only in unity is there strength and it is sometimes expedient to fight fire with

fire.

Again, I surely would like to know why Sowell expects the motivations and feelings of blacks to be so different from those of any other people. He points out W.E.B. DuBois, whom he says was snobbish with some black people, looked down on the Irish working class and lived in a fine apartment on New York City's Edgewood Ave. I don't excuse DuBois' snobbery, or that of anyone else, for that matter, but to be truthful about it, I guess I would have to admit that, he like most black leaders and like most leaders and people of any race, is human, imperfect and has some prejudices. And why shouldn't DuBois have lived in a nice apartment on Edgewood Ave if he could afford it? I would like to ask Sowell if he would be or is buddy-buddy with all the white people he might come in contact with in various and sundry ways everyday, if he feels "close" to black people or Indians or Puerto Ricans or Mexicans, and if he wouldn't prefer to live in his present home (which I'm sure must be pretty decent), as opposed to, say, a shack somewhere in Appalachia. Oh, and I would like to ask him if he by any chance is Irish.

The one bit of logic in Thomas Sowell's entire article comes in the fourth paragraph, in which he points out that DuBois and Booker T. Washington, as have other leaders of differing groups, have had the same agenda, "even when their priorities were different." Of course, they did, and that is the important thing for everyone, black and white, to remember. But then, he had to turn around and spoil it all by saying something stupid.

I really couldn't believe that he so vehemently jumped on the black privileged, educated light skinned" most snobbish elite of all "who come from New Orleans, and on Andrew Young and his family who come from New

Orleans and who "have gone to college for generations" (tsk tsk tsk, how terrible!) and on poor "light skinned jazz great Jelly Roll Morton" and his poor old Creole grandmother all in one paragraph! I surely would like to know what Andrew Young ever did to Thomas Sowell, for it seems pretty evident that Sowell really has a "thing" going against Andrew Young! Sowell didn't explain why he feels Andrew Young "thunders from the left"... "always from a militant stance of being blacker than thou," simply(?) because "he defends the image of blacks." How unjust — or unknowing — of him to say that Young cares little about what happens "to actual flesh and blood blacks," when Young marched along with Martin Luther King, Jr. and all the others hand in hand with those "flesh and blood blacks" in Georgia, Mississippi, Washington and Tennessee. And are we to understand that "flesh and blood blacks" do not have images which are a part of them and for which they feel and show concern?

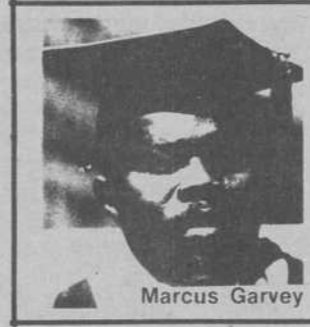
Sowell certainly demonstrates his grandiosity when he so authoritatively states that members of the black elite have "been able to rationalize their special perspective and self-interest as the general good," and that "much of their demand for removing racial barriers was a demand that they be allowed to join the white elite and escape the black masses." He must be out of his cotton pickin' mind! What self-respecting black does he think would want to be anywhere near him and his pompous overbearing self or anyone else like him? Like anyone else, blacks want and aspire to better food, better housing, better cars, better clothes, etc. and as soon as they can afford them (and sometimes BEFORE they can afford them) they get them, just like anyone else does.



Dr. M.L. King, Jr.



Vernon Jordan



Marcus Garvey



Jesse Jackson

"Black Masses?"

that blacks don't expect or want whites to devote ALL their time to the causes of black people, but they do have respect and appreciation for those whites who accept and respect blacks as human beings and try to carry that cause to those whites who are less intelligent than themselves. It is clear that thinking white leaders have not gotten to Thomas Sowell yet, and that he needs considerable "work" done on his thinking!

And I surely don't understand why he says that a well known newsman said, "We can put Ben Hooks and Jesse Jackson on television, but we can't put the Gallup Poll on television." The Gallup Poll is on television all the time — about every topic imaginable. I also must say

By now, we all know that we can put very little faith in public opinion polls. What statistics these polls produce depends solely on who is doing the poll, who the pollees are and what the poller wants to prove. As far as these polls "proving" that what the "black masses" want is "diametrically opposed" to what black leadership fights for, it must be pointed out to Thomas Sowell that no one can become a leader

certainly would never be able to gain that inch of ground without some backing and support from those entities. Sowell only further points out his deep seeded racism, when he not only lambasts black leadership, but also gives a scathing and unjustifiable blow to those whites who support the causes of blacks (He calls them "whites who have a limited time to give to the problems of blacks" and who "need a few familiar blacks they can turn to.") He doesn't have the capacity to understand

something about Sowell's notion that the well-educated "light skinned elite" comprise most of the black leadership. Is there something wrong with the educated serving as leaders? Most white leaders are well educated. And I always thought that one reason for one's becoming educated was to become more aware, more literate and more capable of coping with life's problems — all attributes that are important in leadership. Furthermore, throughout most of the world, the "leadership" is not only superbly educated, but it also comes from long lines of "nobility." It seems to me that in this instance, we blacks have an edge on leadership, for though our leaders are well-educated and SOME of them might be lighter than others, they all know the common problems facing black society, because they all came originally from the same source as Sowell's so called "black masses. That source was slavery!

I must refer to just one more ridiculous inference that Sowell has made and that is that THE MAJORITY of black leadership down through the ages has been the "light skinned elite."

Well, though I've heard it said that "all black folks look alike" to some white

people, I must confess that I've never heard it said that they were mostly all the same color. Oh, well, maybe Sowell is color blind. Therefore, for his edification, I feel obligated to mention just a few black leaders who were or are not light skinned (though I realize that what is dark or light in hue is a very subjective and highly controversial subject) SOME of them might be lighter than others, they all know the common problems facing black society, because they all came originally from the same source as Sowell's so called "black masses. That source was slavery!

I found his entire commentary insulting, insufferable and a discredit to rational people of all races and colors. It seems to me that Thomas Sowell is the one who is "out of touch with people." In fact, he's out of touch with reality!

Shirley Chisholm, Bayard Rustin, Jesse Jackson, Medgar Evers,

Jackie Robinson, Paul Robeson, Roy Ennis, Bill Cosby, John H. Johnson, Jesse Hill, A. Phillip Randolph, Martin R. Delaney, Robert Brown Elliot, Louis Armstrong, Mahalia Jackson, Marian Anderson, Ira Aldrich, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Sidney Portier, Ossie Davis and Cicely Tyson.

Sowell leaves me feeling that HE would LIKE for black leadership, as it becomes more affluent, to "escape" from and forsake the "black masses," but that is wishful thinking on his part. It'll never happen!

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