

# JACOB

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American sentiment has been in tension between the values of freedom and equality. Under President Roosevelt, and for several generations thereafter, the official American inclination has been toward equality. In Reagan's America, the value of freedom has reasserted itself, sometimes at the expense of the gentler instincts."

The Administration's philosophy, at least as perceived by many Blacks, favors the Federal government removing itself from any activity that would foster equality, leaving fate to correct any imperfections that might exist in the society. When you are already equal, that type of approach may be acceptable. But when you are still struggling with an unequal cognized, then the posture of Black voters in the 1984 election becomes understandable.

As disappointing as the results of the election may have been to the majority of Blacks—and the final result was never in much doubt—there were other developments that occurred in 1984 that brought hope and encouragement to Black America. At the top of the list was the candidacy of Jesse Jackson for the Democratic presidential nomination and the flurry of political involvement it helped to spark at the local level; particularly among young Black voters.

The odds were all against Jackson from the very

beginning, but where other candidates, much better financed and with stronger campaign organizations, faltered and dropped out along the primary trail, Jackson persisted up until the convention. In so doing, he engendered tremendous interest on the part of many Blacks in the political system, and made it clear that a Black can be a serious candidate for the highest office in the nation.

The full effects of the campaign may not be known for years, but suffice it to say that American politics can never quite be the same again.

A second positive note was sounded as indications grew that the Black community was engaged in a process of coming together to deal with its own internal problems that threaten the vitality of the Black family, and so threaten the vitality of the Black community itself.

These problems, to a large degree, reflect what America has done to Black people in doling out to them, for so many years, the worst of jobs, housing, health care, education and a host of other components that make up the human existence.

At the same time, Blacks must also share some of the responsibility for not acting before to address in a massive and coordinated way some of the social ills that sap the strength of their communities.

And so when representatives of well over 100 national Black organizations, representing virtually every spectrum of Black America, met at Fisk University in the Spring of 1984, a turning point had been reached. Their purpose was to devise

strategies to place endangered Black families on firmer footing, and to see to it that those strategies were implemented where it counts the most, at the local level. In community after community, many local organizations have increased their voluntary efforts to help troubled youngsters, combat crime and improve educational opportunities. Now, with so many national organizations committed to these same efforts, the cornerstone of future health for our communities has been laid.

The National Urban League is proud to have been a co-sponsor of the Black Family Summit along with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for we are firmly convinced that a reawakened and active community is essential to Black progress.

Toward the end of the year, memories of the coalitions that were so effective in the Civil Rights Movement were revived, when together, Blacks and Whites demonstrated, and some chose to go to jail, to protest the despicable and vicious racist actions of the government of the Union of South Africa. For the first time in years preachers and rabbis, labor leaders and civil rights activists, elected officials and the young, marched hand in hand singing "We Shall Overcome." Even conservative Republican Congressmen protested the South African oppression.

Finally, the conscience of the nation was aroused by the famine in Africa. It took the chilling sight of starving children and adults to do it, but in communities all across the country, the people mobilized their resources to send food to the hungry abroad.

These two developments would seem to indicate that it is still possible to form coalitions of decency, that moral imperatives can unite people in concerted efforts, and that fairness still counts for something.

Perhaps in some ways, it is easier to deal with problems when they are thousands of miles away and transferring the concern shown for people in other lands to your own might not be the easiest of tasks. But the effort has to be made.

On balance, we would suggest that the strongest message coming out of Black America in 1984 was that it became increasingly aware of its own strengths and increasingly willing to act independently to achieve what it considers its own best interests.

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