

Point of View

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CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

"DOUBTING THOMAS" TURNS BACK ON VOTING RIGHTS

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

African American History Month is the traditional time that the nation remembers the history of the African American struggle for justice and freedom. No review of this history would be complete without acknowledging the high, blood-soaked price that African Americans have had to pay to get "voting rights" in America. It is, therefore, quite a slap in the face of all the sacrifices of Martin Luther King, Jr., Medger Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, and many others, for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to vote against voting rights on the eve of African American History Month.

There were many of Judge Thomas' supporters who had argued that "Just give Thomas a chance, he will remember where he came from and how he got where he is today." Yet, thus far Thomas has consistently taken positions that are fundamentally opposed to civil rights. First, he disqualified himself in the important Mississippi racial justice case on education that the Supreme Court decided to review.

Now in Judge Thomas' first vote concerning a civil rights case, he joined in with the neo-conservatives on the Supreme Court to rule 6 - to - 3 to contradict the Voting Rights Act. The case, Presley vs. Etowah County Commission, involved the voting rights of African Americans in the state of Alabama. After African Americans were successful in being elected at the county level in Alabama, white incumbents changed the budgetary authority of certain county offices to prevent African Americans from being involved in the decisions concerning roads and other matters in clear violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Even the U.S. Justice Department had taken a position in support of the rights of the African American officials who sued the Etowah County Commission for violating the Voting Rights Act. In the dissenting opinion,

Justice John Paul Stevens said that this decision signaled a retreat on voting rights. Stevens stated, "The recalcitrant white majorities could be expected to devise new stratagems to maintain their political power" despite efforts by African Americans to use voting as a means of political and economic empowerment.

Although Lawrence Presley was the first African American to ever be elected to the Etowah county Commission, he has

been stripped of some of his elected powers solely because of his race. The Supreme Court of the United States now affirms this backward step to be legal and constitutional. Attorney Pamela Karlan represented Presley in court. Attorney Karlan stated, "If anyone could understand the kind of insidious and subterranean discrimination some southern districts engage in, it's Thomas." But unfortunately, Judge Thomas has forgotten his early days in the South.

In an interview with **USA TODAY**, Attorney Karlan in reference to Judge Thomas emphasized, "He's been a beneficiary of the Voting Rights Act, but doesn't see that the battle is still on...He doesn't see it or doesn't care." The civil rights community can not afford to remain silent as Thomas and others on the Supreme Court take the nation in the direction of racial injustice.

Of course, there were some of us who read the handwriting

on the wall in regard to what kind of posture Thomas would assume on the Supreme Court. There are also many who are praying that "Doubting Thomas" will change.

Federal Judge Leon Higginbotham, Jr. is a highly respected judge in Philadelphia. He recently wrote to Thomas in an appeal for judicial integrity, and historical memory. Higginbotham cautioned Thomas, "You were born into injustice, tempered by the hard reality of what

it means to be poor and black... trust you shall not forget that many who preceded you and many who follow you have found, and will find, the door of equal opportunity slammed in their faces through no fault of their own." We must press forward. Judge Thomas is a disappointment, but we must not let his actions deter the movement for justice. Right will ultimately prevail over wrong, no matter what the color is of the perpetrator of injustice.

MINORITY REPORT

DID BLOODY RODNEY KING PAY PRICE FOR BLACK ATHLETES' SUCCESS AND BIG MONEY?

By James E. Alsbrook

In today's obsession with physical fitness, a big capital "M" stands for MACHO, the "he-man" image and big-muscle craze on which thousands of men have spent millions of dollars.

The capital "M" also stands for MONEY, the quest for which even more men have spent untold millions of hours and oceans of sweat.

These two M's together seem to explain much of the white male's violence against black males today. This violence is a form of "white rage" and was shown in the criminal beating of Rodney King by California police last year. Hitler experienced the same jealousy and "white rage" when provoked by the athletic success of Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympics in Germany.

You might call it frustration caused first by a painful lack of proof of white male physical superiority, and second by the sight of supposedly inferior black men earning millions of dollars in the cash-for-performance competition of basketball, baseball, football, track and boxing.

Recently I walked through the Tri-County Mall near Cincin-

nati. Television sets were showing a Boston Celtics game with only Larry Bird and another white player on the floor among eight blacks. The blacks on both teams scored repeatedly but received little applause from the overwhelmingly white male spectators. But when Larry Bird scored, the place went wild with applause.

One tall white player missed a rebound because he was out-jumped by a shorter black player. "That white boy just can't get two feet off the floor at the same time," a white spectator moaned disgustedly. "Put him on the bench," the spectator shouted at the television set to the Boston Coach hundreds of miles away. He was infuriated when a black out-performed a white.

Some years ago when Hank Aaron broke Babe Ruth's home run record, many lamentations from white men were uttered. Aaron was attacked and despised because he had dethroned a white athlete hero and sacred cow. Some sports-casters speculated that maybe the baseballs of Aaron's time were more lively than those of Ruth's time.

Others argued that the pitching was not as good as it was in

Ruth's day, so Aaron's record was not valid. Some argued about the season's length and the temperatures of the cities in which the games were played.

In 1988 when black Doug Williams of the Redskins threw three touchdown passes in the second quarter against the Denver Broncos who were supposed to win, visible disappointment twisted the faces of seven white friends watching the game. White Broncos quarterback John Elway was supposed to show the allegedly superior physical and mental prowess of his race.

In boxing, dominant white fighters have not emerged since Rocky Marciano 35 years ago and Roberto Duran, whom Sugar Ray Leonard defeated twice in the 1980s. Most champions and near-champions have been black.

In football, the "most valuable player" awards have been dominated by running backs and wide receivers—the persons who usually score touchdowns—and most of them have been black. Moreover, black quarterbacks in college and on professional teams were a "no-no" until Doug Williams, Warren Moon and Randall Cunningham proved wrong the myth that a

white quarterback was needed to run the team on the field.

In track, black men and women dominated the short-distance, hurdling and broad jump areas. Then came Africans to dominate the long-distance races. Whites have scored well in the javelin and discus throws, but blacks have shown very little interest in these.

In tennis, Zina Garrison is ranked among the top five or six women. Black men and women are showing well in collegiate gymnastics where good coaching and equipment are available.

Question: What can macho-

crazed, slow-running, low-jumping, money-hungry jealous, mediocre, non-black, would-be athletes do?

Answer: They can join the police force in one of many cities and with several helpers present and cameras absent, they can prove their physical superiority by beating with clubs a handcuffed black man while they are officially protected by badges, uniforms and loaded revolvers.

THE REAL ISSUE: HOW EXTENSIVE HAS THIS "WHITE RAGE" AFFECTED THE TOTAL AMERICAN SOCIETY?

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