

Point of View

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MINORITY REPORT

DOES BLACK BEHAVIOR CONTRIBUTE TO WHITE MINDSET THAT CONDONES POLICE BEATING OF BLACK PEOPLE?

By James E. Alsbrook

What possibly could have happened to the minds of the twelve jurors in the Rodney King case? Although they repeatedly saw the televised beating of King with police night sticks, they agreed with the police defense argument that King was "in charge" of the situation while lying defenseless on the ground receiving about 70 blows to the head and body.

Several psychologists have called the jurors reaction a "psychic denial." Other terms applied to this jury action are "transfer," "avoidance," "cognitive dissonance" and more. But the mere arrival at the verdict of "innocent" by ostensibly rational beings raises questions concerning the fragility and pliability of the human mind.

Wondering whether Black people themselves could have

contributed to a white mindset that indicated Blacks needs White physical discipline, I asked twelve white professors and staff personnel:

"What have you noticed black people do or say that sends you a wrong or negative message?"

Here are the answers:

1. Black students "segregate themselves on campus, talk too loud, and conform with the traditional stereotype. "This man

added that sometimes certain Blacks "put on a show" of exaggerated swagger and bluster. Also, "They seem to think we're going to reject them, so they want to reject us first."

2. "When Blacks use so called 'Black English' by saying 'ax' instead of 'ask' I get the message that they want to separate themselves from whites. Probably, when they use jive talk and related body movements

with music, they convey the same message intentionally or unintentionally."

He continued, "Many Whites want to except Blacks and befriend them as individuals. Yet, they read cues as indicating Blacks want to stress their separateness."

3. Blacks want equality in jobs, education and other ways, this professor and others said, but the only way to get equality is through integration. He asked, "How can we be integrated if the words and body language Blacks use say they want to be separate?"

4. Two teachers said that they had not focused the race problem because it had been dropped from the national agenda since 1980, when Reagan was elected.

5. Another mentioned loudness: "I suspect that many of us are turned off by what we perceive as excessively loud carryings-on by young Black people—even those attending college. Many seem to have to shout and screech when they meet."

On "sluriness," this teacher said "Young Black college students often refuse to smile or converse openly with Whites, at least until they size all us up and get more comfortable. I realize this may be an understandable defense mechanism. But it can still be disturbing."

On rap music: "I understand many lyrics are not only vulgar,



JAMES E. ALSBROOK, Ph.D. but bitterly racist. I also find it offensive artistically; rap music is an oxymoron—it's not music; its recitation."

On "reverse racism": "Some Black people, confronting any criticism of any blacks or black agendas (no matter how logical or reasonable the criticism) accuse the offending whites of racism. This automatic, knee-jerk reaction can be a major turn-off. Some Jews are guilty of this, too, reading anti-semitism into any criticism of Israel.

On language: "It can be annoying to hear young Black people who seem to view "correct" English as "White English".

On slavery: One teacher said he wishes Blacks would not consider him responsible for slavery. "My ancestors sided with the union."

On religion: "Some Blacks use the church for entertainment rather than for worship. Their choirs dress in robes and do the boogie-woggie or the funky chicken or anything for television cameras. They are clowning. They remind me of our long gone White holy rollers and snake handlers."

Are these criticisms justified? Sampling about 30 Whites produced repetition of the same items listed above. Do they suggest that Blacks need corporal punishment from police officers? I don't think so.

POLITICAL POINTS

By Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams

CHURCH STOMPIN'

The largest nonissue to become an issue in local politics is the senseless question of, did ministers receive financial contributions from political candidates?" It is improper to ask this question unless you also ask where every single dollar goes from every candidate. Also, do not forget to ask where the candidates themselves receive their money and from whom.

When African-Americans were first brought to America no effort was made to convert them to any religion, as the slave owners felt that a converted person could not be held in bondage. There was also the notion that slaves did not have souls to save.

In the Deep South slaves were allowed to start their own plantation churches of their own. Quite often it would have to be with the specific consent of the white people or under their general supervision. The basic content of the minister's Sermons was taken from the Bible and, little effort was made to control their ideas and sermons, as long as they were confined to a discussion of the

hereafter.

The African-American church, as an institution, did not develop until Richard Allen united a scattered group of Methodist churches to organize the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816. Shortly after this, other men such as Daniel Coker, James Chavis and James Varick formed other churches.

For the most part, these ministers were without formal training in religion and theology. They were natural leaders and because they were "called" to the ministry, the Black church at that time was the one open path to leadership.

These pioneer ministers were most active in the agitation for freedom. Most of them were self-supporting as their congregations were too poor to support them. They worked with the various abolitionist groups, took active roles in the Underground Railroad movement, and were active workers in organizing workers. In general, they were the spokesmen for free African-Americans.

During the 1840's and thereafter, African-American leadership continued to emanate from

the pulpit. Even after the turn of the century, ministers were still the major spokesmen and leaders despite the rise of worldly men such as W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and William Monroe Trotter. However, it is important to note that the more prominent ministers are known in more than one field, as in cases such as Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Benjamin Mays.

As the 1960's drew to a close, African-American ministers continued to be rather prominent in the fight for a better America. In the SCLC, the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was very political. In Operation Breadbasket, Rev. Jesse Jackson was very political and through the Rainbow Coalition he's still is. In the NAACP, Rev. Benjamin Hooks is very political. And they all should be. Even today African-American churches continue to be sources of leadership in our communities.

Politicians not only go to churches because they have a large number of voters, but the fact is, politicians will go anywhere where a large number of votes are. I have always lived by



Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams

the principle that candidates should not campaign during religious services. When people leave home on Sunday morning headed to church, they are going there to worship; not to here the platform of some politician who only shows up at election season. Its rude and unfair. Instead some other night, maybe during the week, should be set aside as a political night and those church members who are interested in, meeting the candidates can come out.

Political Stompin in churches is an old practice that has been around for a long time and will more than likely continue. But the real issue is that the African-American church and its members must not allow anyone, politicians or anyone else, to disrespect them or their services. Who knows? Maybe disrespectful politicians should pay somebody just for being rude and disrespectful.

African-American ministers, since as early as the 1700's, have not only been (See Church, Page 18)

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