

Point of View

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"ALONG THE COLOR LINE"

THE SEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY

PART I

By Dr. Manning Marable

As Americans face the end of a political epoch, the demise of the Cold War, and the dawn of the twenty-first century, we are challenged to reexamine our principles and politics. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Communism, it has been claimed that America's system of corporate capitalism has triumphed. The basic problems inherent in our class system, such as economic recessions and depressions, deep pockets of poverty in our central cities, hunger and homelessness, supposedly can be resolved.

But from the unemployment lines and the closed factories,

from the inner city ghettos and barrios, from the underfunded public hospitals and schools, a strikingly different perspective emerges. Millions of Americans continue to ask themselves how a "democratic" country like America can have so many poor people, or have 37 million people without medical insurance. Many of us are forced to try to reconcile our democratic ideals and aspirations with the actual contradictions of daily life. The values in which we believe are constantly undermined and compromised by a pervasive system of power, privilege and coercion, which seeks to curtail dissent, silence critics, and which limits the very concept of de-

mocracy itself.

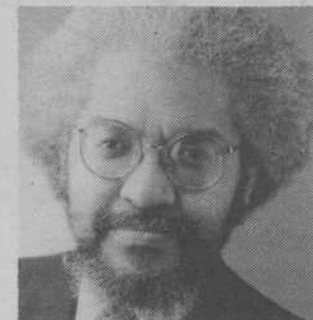
We the people believe in the ideals of political democracy — the ideal of the electoral franchise, the freedom of political thought, association and choice regarding representation — yet we must dwell beneath a political plutocracy, buoyed by vast financial contributions from corporate interests, and maintained by a biased electoral system which rewards the wealthy and severely restricts alternative voices. We the people believe in the ideal of human creativity and work, the principle of a job for everyone who wishes to work. Yet we live under a corporate-controlled system of elitism and privilege, in which the upper one

percent of all households has a greater net wealth than the bottom ninety percent of all American households.

We believe in the concept of human equality and equal treatment under the law, regardless of race, religious beliefs, gender and sexual orientation. Yet we live in a time of growing inequalities between people, a polarization between the super affluent "haves" and millions of increasingly marginalized "have nots." Black, Latino and low income dissent exploded on the streets of Los Angeles last year, yet our government has not passed an urban job program which could address the root economic factors beneath this discontent.

We the people believe in the democratic principles of peace and the right of all people and nations throughout the world to self-determination, the right to choose their own leaders and forms of government. Yet our country leads the world in launching military invasions against leaders and governments it doesn't like; we blockade Cuba, against all reason and logic, because we don't support that country's leader. We prop up corrupt authoritarian regimes and indirectly finance terror, rape and murder across the Third World, perpetuating social conflict at the expense of the poorest and most oppressed people on earth.

We believe deeply that our nation's greatest strength is the colorful mosaic of its ethnic diversity — yet our government actively seeks to curtail immigration from most non-European countries, and brutally rejects and imprisons refugees from coun-



DR. MANNING MARABLE

tries such as Haiti. In short, we the people believe in expanding democracy to include greater rights for all Americans. Those who exercise real power in our system actively seek to curtail our voices, to limit our choices to block and to eliminate genuine alternatives in politics. Our current political process, designed two centuries ago, must be reformed in order to reflect the new and deeply democratic aspirations of the majority of American people. Thus our challenge is to reconcile our democratic dreams with our undemocratic realities. We must transform our society to end the hypocrisy and elitism which fosters alienation and frustration among voters.

(See Color Line, Page 24)



POLITICAL POINTS

By Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams



SHAFTING OUR CHILDREN

On April 29, 1992 this nation was once again forced to confront its historic, long-standing failure to include African-Americans as full participants in the American experiment in representative democracy. The aftermath of the Rodney King trial jury's verdict clearly suggests that the vaunted phrase found in the U.S. pledge of allegiance - "with liberty and justice for all" - has little practical meaning for Americans of African heritage.

Exactly one month later on May 29, 1992, Mayor Jan Jones and Councilman Frank Hawkins announced the Multijurisdictional Community Empowerment Commission. This commission was designed to implement plans and programming for the "revitalization, reconstruction and empowerment" of the West Las Vegas community. Yes even Las Vegas was forced to confront its historic, long-standing failure to include African-Americans as full participants in the Las Vegas experiment in representative democracy.

The twenty-seven member commission was clearly show-and-tell. The make-up

of the group were people in positions that were capable of doing the very same things the commission was designed to do. So if they were really serious about "revitalization, reconstruction and empowerment," they could have collectively done it long before May 29, 1992.

At first not wanting any part of this political grandstanding, I decided to participate for two basic reasons. First, I received a telephone call from a former county commissioner who basically said to me, "I think it's B.S. as well, but however, if you are not at the table with them, then I and my family who live in your district, will not be represented. Secondly, I was asked to chair the sub-committee addressing the needs and concerns of the youth in West Las Vegas from an educational and recreational standpoint. For these two reasons, I agreed to play with the "good ole' boys and gals."

Knowing the importance of our youth to our very existence I was anxious to work to pull together a strategy to address the state of our young folk. I clearly understand that many of our young people believe, because of the conditions surrounding them, that equality of opportu-

nity does not exist; so they give up. This creates a vicious circle - talents are squandered, teenagers are ill prepared, employment is denied and at-risk behavior is reinforced. This is even more reason to denounce lowly politicizing at the expense of our children. Adolescence too often is a time of self-doubt, of loneliness and of fear of failure. And too often these feelings can even raise the awesome question of whether or not life is worth living. And we all know how that question has been answered in the past several years.

At any rate, the various subcommittees that were set up comprised of about eight to ten people, each addressing issues from employment, housing, law enforcement and etc. The subcommittee on youth was the only subcommittee that met in full view of the public and all meetings were open. The meetings were held each Wednesday night at Mabel Hoggard school. We were asked to solicit ideas and programs that the West Las Vegas community wanted to see supported by the city and the mayor and councilman would see that the programs were funded. In fact, I was told specifically to remind the citizens not to



Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams

worry about money, but instead spend our time submitting miniproposals that was outlined by City Hall. We were also told that the subcommittee on youth would not be a one-shot deal, but rather an ongoing ordeal. In fact, I am still receiving proposals from groups and members of the community.

Unlike the other subcommittees that met on other issues, the subcommittee on youth took the position that whoever showed up to the meetings and expressed interest in our children, automatically became members of the subcommittee.

Now, more and more people are asking about the status of their proposals and people are still submitting proposals to me even today. Moreover, many people who came relentlessly to the weekly meetings are also wondering whether the mayor and the councilman will ever respond to the concerns of our children. I tried to talk to the mayor about these con-

(See Political Points, Pg 21)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mayor,

I wanted to send you a letter of appreciation. After being contacted by WAAK-UP regarding the children's safety at Booker, you responded immediately. Too often when we as citizens make appeals to elected officials, our grievances fall on deaf ears. You were genuinely concerned, promised to act, and then followed up on your promises.

Our main concern was the children attending Booker, one of the Prime 6 schools, that have to cross Martin Luther King Blvd.. That is a dangerous intersection and many vehicles have been constantly observed speeding

illegally where the children had to cross. After many parents contacted WAAK-UP, we contacted you and the problem was solved. Thanks to you, we now have a crossing guard there which has made it much safer for the children.

If more elected officials would respond to the citizens they represent, a lot of the problems that exist today would be eliminated. The people certainly need to be heard and their requests responded to in a positive manner.

Respectfully,
Marzette Lewis,
President, WAAK-UP

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