

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

WHAT TO AFRICAN AMERICANS IS THE FOURTH OF JULY?

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Thirteen years before the Emancipation Proclamation Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist and orator, delivered a Fourth of July speech in which he pointed out the hypocrisy of this country's celebration of Independence Day while it still held millions in bondage. This year, as the whole world has celebrated the freedom of South Africa, African-Americans have had a bittersweet feeling of joy for our brothers and sisters in South Africa and sadness that 131 years after the Emancipa-

tion Proclamation, we still are not free in our own country.

Some would argue that African Americans are free — that the Emancipation Proclamation provided that. But for nearly a century after that document, African Americans in many southern states were prevented from the most basic tenet of any democracy — the right to vote. Some would argue that African Americans were free with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, which ensured the right of African Americans to vote. But until the passage of a

strengthened voting Rights Act in 1990, only two African Americans from the South were elected to Congress in 71 years and few were able to be elected to county and state legislatures or to be judges.

Some would argue that African Americans were free with the Supreme court Brown vs. Board of Education decision which ended school segregation and began the integration process for other areas as well. But the fact is that although integration has worked for a few, it has meant that those left behind in the inner cities have few positive role models, few businesses

and services, poor education and a declining housing stock.

The reality, as we celebrate yet another Forth of July, is that many African Americans are still slaves in America. We are slaves to violence. According to the Children's Defense Fund, homicide is now the third leading case of death for elementary and middle school children and since 1979 more children have been killed by firearms than soldiers killed in the Viet Nam War. Black children are planning their funerals instead of their proms and three quarters of black adults worry that their children will not live to become adults.

We are slaves to poor education. Many city school systems are almost completely attended by children of color. Meanwhile, one of the dilemmas corporate America now finds itself in is that increasing numbers of high school graduates can barely read or write or compute and thus, the quality of our work force is declining. In many of our larger cities fifty, sixty and even seventy percent of young people drop out of high school before graduation. Too many of our young people are discouraged from succeeding in school — ostracized by their peers for having "white" values

and not expected to do well by teachers and school systems which too often have low expectations for African American youth.

We are slaves to poor health care or no health care at all. African American children die at the same rate as children in some third world countries. Our people face higher incidences of cancer, hypertension, heart disease and diabetes and often have fewer options for medical care. AIDS has increased by 185 percent among heterosexual African American women over the past year alone and in New York City 90 percent of all children with AIDS are African American or Latino. Yet African Americans, even those with the best insurance, are less likely to receive the best or most up-to-date treatments, whether it be for heart conditions or AIDS.

We are slaves to an economy in which there are millions of unskilled, untrained African American workers whose strong backs and ability to pick cotton or assemble cars are no longer needed by society. Unemployment rates in the African American community can be nearly double that of whites and many African Americans have simply stopped looking for work and are no longer counted as unemployed. While a small percentage of African Americans have prospered over the past two decades, millions have been lumped together into the so-called underclass, where they feel abandoned by society and hopeless about the future. Generations of African Americans are living on welfare and children grow up not knowing anyone with a job.

Frederick Douglass reminded himself of the mournful wail and the bleeding children of his recent ancestors in that Fourth of July speech nearly a century and a half ago. Let us remember those chains and our children as this country celebrates Independence Day once again. And let us also hear Douglass' words once more as well:

For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be started, the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced.

And let us remember that until all of us are free, none of us is free.

NOTES FROM THE SCHOOL OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Once again we'll be faced with another Euro American "holiday," the 4th of July. That's the day when white America declared its independence from Britain. And I can bet that come this 4th of July many Africans in America are going to be celebrating up a storm. But I have to ask you, what do you have to celebrate?

On July 4, 1776, when this day was proclaimed sacred, Africans in America were one hundred and fifty plus years into slavery and there was no end in site. Euro Americans were declaring independence from the British colonial empire whom they had defeated in the American Revolution. It would be close to another hundred years before so-called independence or freedom for the African would be granted.

The American Revolution was not fought with ideas of altering the status of Africans in this country. Euro Americans fought for their best interest and nobody else's. This celebrated day is referred to as the Fourth of You-Lie by the Rev. Ishakamusa Barashango, one of our preeminent African scholars. As he put it, "Euro Americans blatantly lied to us when they promised us freedom if we would fight for their liberation from Britain and the tyranny of King George..."

The only time the African in America was taken into account during this epoch of American history was when the Euro American realized that we could be used as shields against British muskets, thereby minimizing for whites the risk of being killed.

I realize that after so many years of Euro American indoctrination you may find it hard to believe that the 4th of July is nothing to celebrate, but let's look at the facts: independence from a tyrant was declared while at the same time the African was tyrannically kept in slavery. I don't know about you, but I find nothing to celebrate in that.

For those of you who are moved by these words and wish to know more, pick up the book African People and European Holidays: A Mental Genocide, by Barashango and read for yourselves. And for those of you who are American to the core, I say "Happy Fourth of You-Lie."

Until next time, this has been the Minister of Information!

GUEST COMMENTARY

REALITY CHECK

By Kamau Khalfani, Prime Minister of Information

If it's O.K with you I'd rather not participate in the media propaganda program. Which one you ask?

The on about no good black men that run off to chase a piece of a— or are gay and used a sister to try to "work out" their gayness, or that they are snorting their life away. First of all our values are all backwards. We think like white folks! I'll bet that there are plenty thinking that if a man is gay that he can't be a good father. In fact there are many of you who think that he can't be a real man when you don't even have a clue yourself as to what a real man is (and no I'm not, just for you out there with the little brains that can only conceive of what you actually participate in), but I've seen plenty of gay men that were taking care of the business of being a father in a far more complete way than those so called "real men".

What about the images of Black men and drugs, they are

just mindless dols... Yet I know plenty of men doing drugs, all kind of drugs and many times their greatest worries for the day happens to be how to feed the baby. Also don't forget the statistics that say that there are no men in the house and that they don't participate in the lives of their children. I run into so many brothers that have their children with them, children who have the mark of confidence and security, who look happy as a bugger in a congested nose to be learning from their dad.

I think that part of the problem is that the Black man's presence in the life of his child does not meet with the "Father Knows Best" criteria of not only how dad is supposed to act, but look as well. Let's not beat around the bush, pretty much all the standards of fatherhood that we access (for the most part) are white. In fact most people think that "if you have no money you can't be a father" (Don't get me wrong, I know that in this world of milk and honey that you have got to have some money.) But does the brother ever get credit for staying? Make no mistake, this is a hard thing to do because money eventually becomes a major topic and rightfully so, but the pressure can drive even a good man away.

What about knowledge and guidance? No I'm afraid they don't get very high marks, they are usually met with the rebuttal of "You can't eat knowledge" and I dare not speak of the issues of security and stability that the brothers bring with them.

I know he does not speak correctly, he does not have a degree, he's too short, he does not know how to hold a decent conversation, his idea of ro-

mance does not stack up to the silver screen's version (what no roses!) Today his sex is too tame, in fact he needs to learn some more technics and tomorrow he's too wild, he wants it all the time. He has no sophistication and you can't take him anywhere where there are civilized people (meaning white people) because he does not fit in and he makes them nervous, but more importantly he might get in the way of one of those flowery comments thrown at you by the King of Romance. After all he is the face that you see on the soap operas and the big movie screen... and his features are the ones that you use to gauge your man by, are they not? Don't you have to look at his skin first to see if your man's skin is too dark? Don't you want to know if your man gets his hair as straight as his? I guess by now you can justify you man amounting to nothing...but tell me one thing...why do your children cry themselves to sleep calling for Daddy?

Why do you feel so jealous of all the attention Daddy gets, when it was you that did all the work! It must be very painful after all that you have done to have your child look into your face and ask "When is Daddy coming home."

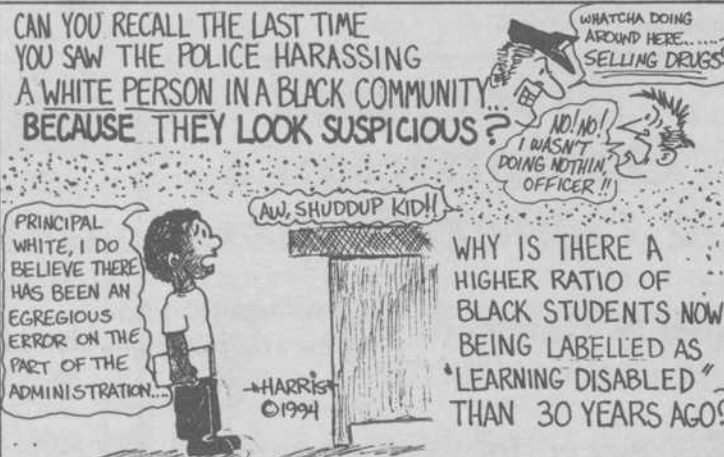
Could it be that their relationship is not based on the same "learned behavior" that you base your relationships on? Take the time out to give the brother his due, praise him for the right that he does and help correct the wrong.

Black woman, you are the first teacher...teach that brother to love you and the family...but you must use "our" lesson plan. Hotep (Peace).

POINTS

TO PONDER

BY PROFESSOR #HARRIS#



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