

Point of View

BETWEEN THE LINES

Tucker's Conviction & Alibi: Criminal Entrapment and Blind Ambition?

By Asadullah Samad

Many people think the prosecution and conviction of California Congressman Walter Tucker, III was a tough break. Whether the government "put it to him" as Tucker purports or whether he "did it to himself" as most people I've talked to think, to see one who has given their life to serving the interest of the people, take a fall, is difficult. Except where it doesn't appear public interest was being served. This is such a case.

On many occasions, the fall has nothing to do with what role the leader serves in the public. This is also the case in this instance. Still it is an exploitation of an error in judgement, or some activity pulled out of one's past, that is the factor that turns the tables on leadership. And where black leaders are concerned, many times it is the government behind the leader's push off the edge of a cliff. Sometimes it's evident, other's it's not. The appearance of the hidden hand (and its subsequent disclosure) is key in how resilient that leader will be in bouncing back from their fall. Some land hard and stumble to their feet, others crash to the ground and never recover. Much of it has to do with the time, circumstance and acceptance of personal responsibility of the one taking the fall. That's what makes the Tucker case so sticky. Was Tucker tripped or did he trip himself?

I carefully pose this scenario to ask a question. At what point does one accept responsibility for what they do as leaders? The federal conviction of California Congressman Walter Tucker, III, on nine counts of extortion and tax evasion, is one of the cold realities of being a black leader. Whether you are being held to a different standard by your community and being held to a different standard by the government, answers have to make sense — even if the answer is, "Yes, I did this but..." or "I accept responsibility for this and..."

This piece is not to dump on Tucker, or take a "holier than thou" position (that many in our community are taking), but to discuss the sensitivity of Tucker's predicament based on what I know having been compromised at one time by the government (with the aid of some people in our community). While nowhere near to the extent that Tucker is dealing with, I know what it is to have to publicly defend your integrity. But it starts with acknowledging your own error. Defending one's self and being

redeemed starts with a certain acknowledgment that I don't hear in Tucker post conviction comments. An acknowledgment that there was some culpability on Tucker's part. Certainly, the possibility of entrapment is real. But entrapment starts with a willingness to be trapped.

The entrapment activity of black elected officials started over ten years ago. Many escaped, including initial targets, former California Assemblyman Willie Brown, Tennessee Congressman Harold Ford and former Mayor Tom Bradley, because they were not susceptible to continuing arrangements, which allows one to be set up. If they did anything, it was hit and miss, one down and punt, or one layer removed. The susceptibility to being entrapped is contingent upon how willing one is to being manipulated into a certain activity and how frequent that activity occurs. Moreover, you may not always see the trap but you can step around it if you know where the boundaries are. You may do something once, twice, and say you didn't know, that's where the racism comes into play.

Racial precautions are in the amount of leeway the government gives those they catch in compromising positions. Blacks will never receive the kind of benefit (of the doubt) their white counterparts will receive. And what whites are prosecuted for doing in billions and millions, blacks are prosecuted for doing in thousands and sometimes hundreds. Whereas, whites, in overwhelming numbers for instance, are given wide discretion in questionable activities, blacks aren't and Tucker is accurate in his analogies of selective prosecution. The government does selectively prosecute and the fact that they had this tape on Tucker three years is proof. Why didn't they prosecute when he was Mayor of Compton? They didn't need to, they could wait until they needed to use it...and they did. But Congressman Tucker has another problem. How he managed to show up on tape a dozen times over 30 hours of video tape, without ever mentioning a formal consulting agreement or reducing it to writing or not having one payment ever ending up where it was supposed to end up (on tax returns or in a campaign account). Something is wrong with that.

Tucker, in his conviction, continues to maintain that he is a victim. That he is. But is he



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really a victim of what he says he is, government entrapment? Or was it more the engaging downside of blind ambition, that him susceptible to going back to the table, over and over again. Calling this blind ambition is giving Congressman Tucker the benefit of the doubt. I believe it was both, but more the latter than the former. And we have yet to mention corruption, as corrupt as the tapes appeared. That's because the government is not above it, and they will lie and fabricate to win their case (which I know firsthand). Tucker claims as God is his witness, he will be vindicated. Well, let's say one thing, he has a "sho' nuff" witness in God. And God protects the righteous (as I can bear witness). You can be wrong at times (in error) and still be righteous. But your redemption will come in acknowledging you are wrong and moving to correct it. The last 30 days has been spent listening to Walter Tucker on the talk radio circuit, convoluting the reality of his conviction with a relentless attack on the government and the judicial process, finding fault with everybody but the one who put himself in this position in the first place, himself.

Tucker kept showing up in the wrong place, at the wrong time, taking cash and delivering support (if not his vote). All of the confidentiality of this fake business, in the world wasn't worth what Tucker now faces. One thing is perfectly clear; Walter Tucker, III was not fault-LESS. He may not have done what they say he did, but he needs to take some responsibility for what he did do, whether it was showing up where he had no business, doing business as he did (even if it was out of naiveté) or just admitting what he did. Walter Tucker's vindication weighs in the balance of people who perceive him as acknowledging his actions, not in his alibi.

URBAN PERSPECTIVE

Is It a Continuing March?

By Larry Aubry

Here are some interesting statistics on the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. last October 16. Age — 18-29 years, 34 percent; 30-44, 43 percent; 45 and older, 23 percent. Education — less than high school, 5 percent; high school graduate, 22 percent; some college, 34 percent; graduate or professional school, 14 percent.

Income — under \$24,999, 17 percent; \$25,000-\$49,000, 37 percent; \$50,000-\$74,999, 23 percent; over \$75,000, 18 percent. Political party preference — Democrats, 62 percent; Republicans, 3 percent; Independents, 20 percent; other, 15 percent. Ideology — Liberal, 31 percent; Moderate, 21 percent; Conservative, 13 percent; Nationalist, 11 percent; other, 25 percent.

Presidential candidate preference — Colin Powell, 37 percent; Jesse Jackson, 23 percent; Bill Clinton, 14 percent; Ross Perot, 3 percent; Bob Dole, 1 percent; none, 22 percent. (Source — Howard University Political Science Department and the Wellington Group, a black-owned market research firm based in Oaklyn, New Jersey).

David Ruffin, editor of FOCUS, the monthly magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, October/November issue, offers his personal observations of the Million Man March. These observations follow and can serve as a basis for assessing post-march objectives and initial progress.

Ruffin begins by admitting that for months before the Million Man March, his hints about who would dominate attendance — young men with blue-collar jobs who tended to be disconnected from politics — proved wrong. Arriving at the west steps of the Capitol about 10 a.m. on the day of the march, Ruffin met a mechanical engineer, accompanied by several fraternity brothers, a group of high school students from Mobile, Alabama, neatly clad in black suits, a teacher who was part of an eight bus caravan from Gary, Indiana, two businessmen from Seattle, a subway conductor from Manhattan, and manager of a cosmetics firm from Chicago.

Few marchers came as followers of any individual. For many, attending the march was an expression of black unity and a way to affirm what is best for African American men. A teacher from a middle school in Baltimore brought 35 boys from the school's Mentorship to Manhood program. He told Ruffin, "This time and place will

be marked in the history books."

A bridge operator from New York City risked getting fired by coming to the march. A man from a small town in Pennsylvania told him, "The economic agenda speaks to my way of thinking. If we develop our neighborhoods economically, then we'll have less concern for what the Republican Congress might do."

Some saw the march in religious terms. A man from Reading, Pennsylvania, who described himself as a Moorish American, said, "This is a family gathering of God for black men to come together as a family. We are the most divided people in America. If we love ourselves, we can love others." Two paramedics from New Jersey came to support the march by volunteering to staff an emergency medical station.

The march should not be defined, as some in the media insist, by the personality of Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam and all of his past speeches, or Jesse Jackson or Congressman Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.), or any other leader or speaker, for that matter. The march was really about the hundreds of thousands of other men who came to Washington, paying their own way.

Contrary to some characterizations, the Million Man March was not an expression of anti-Semitism, racial hatred or Separatism. Some critics of the march have asked how African Americans would feel if white supremacist David Duke had called for a similar rally in Washington. This is a false comparison. David Duke would not have made atonement a major theme, David Duke would not have shared his platform with the white equivalence of Rosa Parks, Dorothy Height, Stevie Wonder. Gang leaders at the Million Man March publicly asked forgiveness for the harm they have done to the black community and vowed to offend

no more. Would David Duke have encouraged racist skinheads to do the same?

While many attending the event expressed concern about the GOP's legislative agenda, they did not come to Washington with clenched fists. Indeed, there was nothing but civility and good feelings among those gathered there. Women and white people who came to the march, though not expressly invited, were made to feel welcome. Members of the Nation of Islam stood as marshals along the walkways of the mall, but their services were unnecessary.

Ruffin states he will never forget the sense of collective trust felt as one, five, ten, and twenty-dollar bills were dropped in large plastic bags to support march expenses.

Most of the marchers are politically active. Over 86 percent who arrived in Washington already registered to vote. Nearly half said they contacted a public official, contributed money to a political candidate, served in an election campaign, or attended a public hearing.

Ruffin came away from the march impressed by the fact that so many strong, intelligent black men from all over the country and with such divisive backgrounds could be mobilized for such an event. Add to their numbers the millions of sympathetic men who stayed home. The sum represents a formidable political force that neither major political party has worked very hard to attract.

Will there be the sustained follow-up to the vision and resolve articulated at the Million Man March?

There must be a serious attempt to define and separate form from substance and answer questions such as whether individual "buy in" is sufficient, or should some sort of organizational or group affiliation be required? Continuing the Million Man March is an extremely difficult but necessary endeavor which should not be allowed to dissipate.

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