

POINT OF VIEW

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

How the NAACP can help the advancement of our people

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

Some have accused the NAACP of being out of touch with the African American community and our current state of affairs.

To the extent that this is true, the NAACP is not unique. Indeed, much of the political and activist infrastructure in the Black community is out of step and out of date. In my opinion, however, the NAACP is one organization that has taken the lead in struggling to address this situation and to redefine itself. I respect the NAACP for daring to take risks — including the ones that resulted in failure.

I respect the organization for undertaking a serious political self-evaluation. I have hopes that Kweisi Mfume will use his considerable political skill and his progressive social vision to create an environment in which the NAACP can reposition itself — not merely to be relevant, but to be in the forefront of change for our people.

America is in crisis: economic, social, cultural, moral, and political. Some would say the dimensions of the political crisis are such as to embody a constitutional crisis. The government is profoundly distrusted by the American people. The two most imposing political institutions — the Democratic and Republican parties — are also profoundly distrusted. Though they continue to put themselves forward as having solutions to the multi-dimensional crisis of the country — it is now the case that more and more Americans are coming to identify the two parties, and the political system they preside over, as the source of the crisis.

For African Americans, the dissonance between our agenda and the agenda of the political party that purports to represent us — the Democratic Party — has become undeniable. In its



DR. LENORA FULANI

rush to compete with the Republican Party for white conservative male voters, it has abandoned the African American electorate, its most loyal constituency. We are expected to vote for the Democrats, while getting nothing in return but an occasional and perfunctory acknowledgment.

Some people have said that Bill Clinton's presence at Brother Mfume's swearing-in ceremony was a sign of respect for us: a sign that we are still included as a major partner in the Democratic Party coalition. I disagree. I think President Clinton's appearance at the NAACP ceremony was a calculated political manipulation based on his awareness that there is considerable disaffection with the Democrats among Black folks. President Clinton saw the Million Man March.

He saw that a veritable sea of Black men — and women — cheered when Minister Farrakhan called on the African American community to constitute itself as an independent "third force" in American politics, and to relinquish its blind loyalty to the Democratic Party.

Mr. Clinton wants to make sure we stay put. He wants to make sure that we don't consider or create other political options. That is why there is so much propaganda out there about how frightened we should be at the prospect of a Republican victory in 1996. About how we should focus on helping the Democrats

regain control of Congress. About how we, as Black people, should simply be grateful for what we've got.

I don't think we should be grateful for what we've got. We've got deteriorating communities, youth without hope, an infestation of drugs, an epidemic of crime and violence. We've got a severely eroded political position. And we've got two political parties that were founded when we were enslaved. We have yet to be the

creators of a political party to represent us.

All that is changing now. The so-called radical white center — the 20 million Americans who voted for Ross Perot in 1992 — have made the statement loud and clear that they're not prepared to sit back and accept what they've got, when what they've got is getting devalued every day. And it should be the same for us. In my opinion, Black America has more in common nowadays with white

middle America than it does with some of our traditional white liberal coalition partners. The liberals are still benefiting from the Clinton game plan, while we are literally being sold down the river.

Where does Black America need to go? I believe that it needs to go straight into a political partnership with the white center to create a new independent party in America. The political move will create one of the greatest and most significant

upheavals in Black history and in American history. I believe it is the key to our empowerment and our development — politically and economically.

If the NAACP finds a way to play a role in this process, it will truly be working for the advancement of our people and not merely for the advancement of the Democratic Party. In playing such a role it will become among the most relevant organizations in the Black community today.

ALONG THE COLOR LINE

Class welfare in America

(Part two of a two part series)

By Dr. Manning Marable

A half century ago, at the end of World War II, American unions and capital reached an agreement about the future of labor relations. The union movement essentially agreed to expel radicals and Communists from its ranks, and to limit strikes and militant actions. In return, the corporations shared their profits in the form of higher wages and benefits. By the early 1970s, American workers enjoyed the highest living standard in the world. As AFL-CIO president George Meany declared, "We believe in the American profit system."

But as global competition increased, capitalists cut costs, lowering wages and firing workers. Millions of jobs were shipped abroad to exploit low wage, non-unionized labor. In many factories, occupational safety standards deteriorated, and employees lost many of their health benefits and pensions. But most unions had collaborated with the bosses for so long, they were unable to mount a counteroffensive against the corporations.

When President Reagan smashed the air traffic controllers' union during its 1981 strike, it sent a clear message to the corporations that union busting was on the immediate agenda. By 1987, nearly three-fourths of all contracts that covered one thousand or more workers included wage concessions.

Approximately two hundred thousand workers became non-union due to decertification elections in the 1980s. By the end of the decade, union membership declined to 16 percent of the American labor force. Workers lacked an effective, progressive labor movement which could fight for higher living standards.

But perhaps the major reason that millions of American workers feel betrayed is the widespread wave of corporate layoffs. In the 1990s, as Wall Street stocks reached all-time highs and corporate profits soared, millions of workers were thrown out of work. In December, 1991, General Motors announced that it was firing seventy-four thousand workers. Barely one year later, Sears, Roebuck and Company, fired fifty thousand employees. Soon other corporations began to fire thousands of workers to improve their profitability.

In 1993, Boeing dismissed twenty-eight thousand workers, Philip Morris cut fourteen thousand, and IBM slashed sixty thousand jobs. The next year, Delta Air Lines announced fifteen thousand layoffs, NYNEX cut sixteen thousand eight hundred jobs, and Scott Paper fired more than one-third of its total workforce, over eleven thousand people. This January, AT&T Chief Executive Officer Robert Allen announced that his corporation was firing forty thousand employees. Coincidentally, Allen's annual salary at AT&T was 3.3 million dollars.

Who can expect American workers to feel any loyalty to companies that only are concerned about profits and not people? Corporate executives pay themselves millions of dollars in salaries, fringe benefits, bonuses and stock options, while millions are losing their jobs. For example, in 1975 the average chief executive officer of a corporation received about forty times the salary of an average worker. Today that ratio has jumped to 190 times as much. The typical CEO of America's 100 largest corporations received about \$900,000 in annual salary, and \$3.5 million in overall compensation.

We need governmental policies which create jobs and promote income growth for working people. One essential step toward that goal is the reallocation of government expenditures from wasteful military spending into the social and economic infrastructure that makes productivity possible. We urgently need to make massive public investments in housing, streets, highways, railroads, bridges, hospitals and clinics, public schools and universities to create new jobs.

The noted scholar Seymour



DR. MANNING MARABLE

Melman, chairperson of the National Commission for Economic Conversion and Disarmament, observes that 750,000 additional jobs would be created "if \$165 billion were transferred from the military to education, transportation, environment, housing, etc. If an additional \$80 billion, raised by restoring 1980 tax levels on the super rich, were spent on conversion, an additional 2.5 million jobs could be created." It is time that we placed the welfare of working people and their families ahead of the corporations, the powerful and the privileged.

Dr. Manning Marable is Professor of History and Director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies, Columbia University, New York City.

Oscars

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roundball. We all know entertainment and athletics have been vehicles for our people to succeed. But does that success come without a responsibility to speak up. Of course, it does but the image makers are so strong, they can step on one and make them an example. Jack Johnson, Paul Robeson and Curt Flood (the father of free agency) are all perfect examples of superior talents that sacrificed their careers to stand up for fairness and equality. Some may not be ready to go there, but does that mean we can't say nothin'. Is this the return of the days Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Stepin' Fetcher', who were the richest blacks of their day playin' the only roles they could play, entertaining and enriching white folk without recognition. Or Joe Louis, who was certainly the greatest talent of his time, having to say "it was just another lucky night" every time out but couldn't speak for his people's pain and suffering. Artistic greatness is in our people. Nobody can take that away. They can omit it from the pages of their history where mention of us are only side notes to far lesser performances. It doesn't make sense

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