

POINT OF VIEW

ALONG THE COLOR LINE

Strategy for 1996

By Manning Marable

What approach should we take to revive the African-American and the progressive movements in the United States? What challenges and tasks are ahead as we confront the 1996 election?

Labor leaders, liberals and the Civil Rights community are already saying that our only political alternative is to endorse President Clinton and the Democratic Party. Certainly the election of Republican Challenger Robert Dole would



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be a disaster for black people. Remember Dole's refusal to speak at the NAACP's annual convention this summer,

sneering that Kweisi Mfume was "trying to set me up." Yet if we follow a strategy which focuses solely on the presidential campaign, we will limit our effectiveness in changing the parameters of American politics. We should approach electoral politics from the vantage point of building movements for social justice. We need to enhance the organizational capacity and effectiveness of institutions which are sites for democratic resistance and grassroots mobilization.

There are four key components in this strategy for progressive political change: building institutions which empower working class and poor people; initiating protests involving civil disobedience and direct action; supporting independent political activities and organizations; and isolating and defeating the Right.

It is absolutely clear that the Far Right deliberately manipulates racism as a tool to polarize voters. Many of the issues which will define the 1996 election — affirmative action, minority scholarships at universities, majority-minority legislative districts, Proposition 187 — all involve race. Yet black people must become more active in building movements that bring



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The prison industrial complex

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Twice within a few days I heard a new term which sent chills down my spine. The term was "prison industrial complex." It signaled the recognition of the fact that our economy has gone through one more dramatic change — from the post-World War II military industrial complex referred to by President Eisenhower to the



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present day when prisons are the growth industry. We've gone from a nation which builds missiles to one which builds prisons.

The first time I heard the term was in a National Public Radio story about Dannemora, New York which houses a large prison. The prison is the town's largest employer and it is the only place many of the guards have ever encountered Black or Hispanic men and their racism is evident. Many of the businesses in the town are dependent on the guards and prison employees and the wives and mothers who come to visit the prisoners. Without the prison, many people in Dannemora would be out of work.

Prison business is big business in America and not just in Dannemora. Millions of dollars are spent each year in building more prisons. Millions of dollars are spent in purchasing uniforms, linens, beds, paper and other products. Tens of millions are spent on salaries of guards, counselors, doctors and nurses and prison administrators. The prison industry is a growth industry, so much so that private corporations have entered the business.

One of the most frightening aspects of the prison industry is that the majority of those incarcerated are people of color. The majority of those working in the industry are not.

And then there is death row. As of fall, 1995 there were 3,045 inmates sitting on death rows in the United States. Over half of them are people of color. Just about all of them are poor.

Most death row inmates are represented by court-appointed attorneys. In many jurisdictions there are no requirements of proficiency and experience for such attorneys even though capital cases are extremely complex. The court-appointed attorney must ask for funds from the court each time experts in pathology, ballistics, substance abuse and mental health are used. There are very limited funds available for private investigation.

A recent study by the American Friends Service Committee on Native Americans on death row found that in over 70 percent of the cases, native Americans on death row had been substance abusers and that this substance abuse was a controlling part of the inmates life before he committed the crime. Too often such factors are taken into account by prosecutors or juries.

What does it mean that we have chosen to invest in prisons rather than in education and prevention for tens of thousands of our young people? What does it mean for a democracy that one of its fastest growing industries is one which imprisons over a million citizens? What does it mean that people of color are over represented in the prison population and especially, on death row? What does it mean for us all when we have coined a new phrase — the prison industrial complex?

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

Two party immorality

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

Many people today, including many in the black community, are very concerned about the decline of morality in our country.

I consider myself one of those people. I was raised a Baptist and was very active in my church in Chester, Pennsylvania, where I grew up. I am not especially religious now, but many Americans — religious or not — care deeply about issues of morality and character.

I also happen to believe that the issue of morality is regularly manipulated by the politicians. Take a good look at the meeting of the Christian Coalition in Washington, D.C., a couple of weeks ago and you'll see what I mean.

Ralph Reed, the Coalition's executive director, said that while economic issues are important, "man does not live by bread alone" and that "the country will be measured by the moral fiber of our people."

That seems to be a reasonable statement; (in the next breath) Mr. Reed tells a reporter: "Look, the Republicans

people from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, to fight for common concerns. Problems like poverty, inadequate housing and health care don't have a solution that applies solely to one race.

Especially in urban centers, we need to support and strengthen institutions which advocate the interest of working and poor people. Two types of these institutions are labor unions and community-based organizations. With new national leadership the AFL-CIO is attempting to reverse decades of decline. Throughout the country, unions are making new efforts in organizing low wage workers, who are disproportionately Latino and black. Community-based

organizations are active in a whole range of activities, from struggles around public transportation to environmental racism. The most dynamic forms of democratic resistance occur when labor and community groups collaborate with each other. In Chicago, ACORN and SEIU local 880 have initiated a "Chicago Jobs and Living Wage Campaign," which includes 60 union locals, community and church groups. When ACORN organized 200 home care workers in Chicago, that mobilization sparked the development of an SEIU local that has over 11,000 members.

Second, we should revive many of the protest tactics of civil disobedience and nonviolence to confront our

opponents. We will recall that in the 1950s and 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congress of Racial Equality used passive resistance as an effective protest technique to challenge segregation. Today's barrier of color and class, however, is social inequality, challenged by struggles for a living wage, employment, universal health care, education and housing. The nation has moved rapidly toward greater socioeconomic inequality, reducing the wages of millions of families, as social programs have been slashed. Progressives and activists can make the case that the growing

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take back our political process, take back our government and create an environment in the country where we, the people, set the standard for morality.

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