

## COMMENTARY

# Moving toward a new dialogue about race

## Special to Sentinel-Voice

President Clinton's speech on the state of contemporary race relations has stimulated a long-overdue national discussion. The president announced the creation of a national commission to examine issues of race, to be headed by prominent African-American historian John Hope Franklin. During the next year the presidential commission will hold public hearings to explore the dimensions of America's continuing racial crisis.

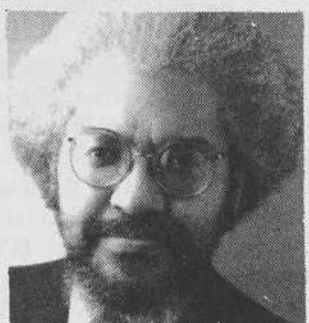
There is much discussion these days about who owes whom an "apology" about the continuing burden of race and racism in American life. White conservatives are now loudly proclaiming that there have been too many apologies given toward black folk. Negroes like Ward Connelly take pride in their auxiliary role of defending white supremacy by outlawing minority scholarship programs to universities and colleges.

Perhaps what is needed from the black perspective is not so much a dialogue with whites about their attitudes and explanations about race, but rather, a critical dialogue within our own community. Our most pressing priority is to think about why the current impasse exists within the black freedom movement, and to develop a new strategy for its rebirth, challenging the structure of white power and privilege in this country.

Throughout the 20th Century, the black movement has always pursued two different strategies for empowerment: liberal integration and racial separatism. The ideology of liberal integration was located in organizations like the NAACP, the National Urban League and among most black elected officials. The advocates of liberal integration believed that black folk would be empowered if representatives from our racial group were elevated into positions of power or prominence. The problem with this form of "symbolic representation" is that too frequently no accountability existed between our so-called representatives and the black masses. Clarence Thomas, for example, was placed on the Supreme Court as a cynical

## Along the Color Line

By Dr. Manning Marable



manipulation of racial tokenism. The fact that he is racially "black" says nothing about the content of his politics, which are reactionary and deeply hostile to blacks' collective interests.

The alternative to integration was represented by black nationalism. The powerful example of the 1995 Million Man March illustrated the extraordinary reservoir of support for the nationalist perspective inside the black community. However, after the march there was a failure to consolidate this widespread support into an effective national organization or program. Disturbingly, the Nation of Islam developed a growing collaboration with white racist cult leader Lydon LaRouche.

The cordial relationship between Minister Farrakhan and white conservatives like Jude Wanniski also illustrated that black nationalism could be just as conservative as Reagan Republicanism. Newt Gingrich and Farrakhan both agree on conservative patriarchal family values, racial self help, supply side economics, and both oppose lesbian and gay rights.

Both integration and nationalism have one basic common starting point — the issue of race. The former perspective seeks to transcend racism by assimilating blacks into the current institutions of society. The other perspective assumes that racism is permanent and will always be with us, and therefore seeks to

separate the community from the white mainstream. Both strategies are in effect reactions to what white people say and do.

Instead of trying to either integrate or separate, we need to think about how to transform this society. We shouldn't be debating at the margins of power how to gather up additional crumbs from the master's table. Nor should we sulk away from national debates about race, pretending that we can go it alone. Our task and our challenge is to lay claim to the future of this society, demanding fundamental changes in the organization of power and resources.

Any dialogue about race as we enter the 21st century has to begin from the premise that "racism" is nothing more than a system of power, privilege and violence, nurtured by centuries of criminal behavior on the part of the white capitalist establishment against our people.

If Clinton wants to talk about apologizing for slavery, he should begin by negotiating the full financial compensation for our unpaid labor power.

If Newt Gingrich wants to discuss why contemporary race relations seem so negative, perhaps we should investigate how the "Contract on America" and Reaganomics have been used to transfer billions of dollars worth of wages from black, poor and working people, to the bank accounts of the wealthy.

Malcolm told us that our struggle was not about integrating or separating but rather the achievement of human rights. To create an honest dialogue on race in this country we need to be clear about the sources of black oppression. We need to build a new black movement anchored in a critique of corporate power which allows us to transcend the rhetoric and political tricknology which passes as critical conversation in the media and in politics about America's racial problems.

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## A VOICE FROM THE HILL

### Black farmers reap bitter harvest

By George Wilson

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The end of summer marks the beginning of the harvest season for the nation's farmers. However, most African-Americans will only reap the bitter fruits of continued land loss and low crop yield.

It seems like only yesterday that members of the Congressional Black Caucus held hearings on the plight of African-American farmers.

During the hearings, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman indicated his willingness to address their numerous complaints, including delayed processing of loans, an unusually high number of African-Americans losing their farms and a general insensitivity on the part of agriculture officials.

Lots of gut-wrenching testimony was produced, the few reporters covering the event got good quotes, but very little change resulted from the exercise.

"The hearings were lip service," said John Boyd, president of the National Black Farmers Association.

"What you saw there is a national disgrace on the hands of the Department of Agriculture. The (Agriculture) Secretary testified that he was going to give emergency funds and operating funds to black farmers, none of which were made.

"When the numbers came out this fiscal year, we noted that there were no loans made. They couldn't find one black farmer in this country to make an emergency loan to. This is a national disgrace."

After getting the bureaucratic shuffle, more than 600 African-American farmers have filed a class action lawsuit against the Agriculture Department.

"This suit has been filed out of frustration,"

Boyd said.

"Here we have an administrative process, out of 800 or 900 cases of discrimination that the department acknowledges, only four to this day have tried to go through their system and have not been able to do so. They are sick and tired of being sick and tired."

The lawsuit addresses processing time, the lack of investigation into civil rights complaints and the lack of settlements of cases.

One of the enduring legacies of the so-called Reagan era was the elimination of the Agriculture Department's Officer of Civil Rights Enforcement.

The result has been what many describe as "the last plantation" situation at the agency.

Glickman promised to do something about the problem, but many African-American farmers are skeptical.

For the dwindling number of African-American farmers, harvest time is a sad time.

They planted late because their loans were late, their yields are low and they won't be able to pay their bills. The result can only be the loss of more farms.

"We are a dying breed," Boyd said.

"Today, we represent less than one percent of the nation's farmers. Sixty-seven percent of that one percent are program participants at the Department of Agriculture.

"The Department has 1.5 million acres of land in its inventory that taxpayers are paying taxes on. Fifty-three percent of that 1.5 million acres is land that is formerly black-owned land.

"This means that they (the Agriculture Department) hold the deed on this land and that in most cases, discrimination took place."

*George Wilson is a 16-year correspondent of the American Urban Radio Network.*

## YOUR MARVELOUS MIND

### Service: Price for space we occupy

By Michael A. Grant, J.D.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

As the world paid its respects to Mother Teresa, we all had an opportunity to focus on an incredible life of service.

Mother Teresa, Noble Prize winner, epitomized the joy and energy that are the by-products of purposeful living. She learned early in her life that it is indeed more blessed to give.

African-Americans have also given the world marvelous examples of selfless, celebrated service to mankind. Our history looms large in America for what we have given to make this world and our country more humane places in which to live.

From Frederick Douglas and Sojourner Truth to Martin Luther King, Jr. and educator Marva Collins, those who placed the well-being of others before any private, self-serving agenda, continue to number greatly in our race.

Two sparkling examples of this tradition of service can be found in Nashville, Tenn.

Two sisters, Mary Elizabeth Craighead, 81 and Sandra Olivia Smithson, 72, have done more in their post-retirement years to help African-American children to believe in themselves and their innate abilities than most of us do in a lifetime.

Both educators and former principals, the two have successfully augmented the efforts of the local public school system. During six weeks in the summer and intermittently throughout the school year, they and a small cadre of teachers catch many inner-city children who might otherwise have fallen through the proverbial cracks of the public education system.

"We don't have a choice," Mary Craighead said. "Far too many of our men and boys are incarcerated. We must do what we can to nip this tide."

The name of their enrichment program is PREP (Project Reflect Educational Programs). And the youth are prepped for school, and in

some ways, for life.

Sandra Smithson, the founder of the program, was quoted in a local newspaper explaining the conversion that many of the children undergo. "We've drug kids screaming into PREP and when it's over, we have to push them out the door. I remember one little boy in particular who finally learned to read. He ran outside yelling at the top of his lungs, 'I can read, Ma! I can read.'"

One child who came to PREP had already been labeled a slow learner by the school where she was regularly enrolled. After one summer in PREP, the little girl returned to that school and by the end of the academic year had made the honor roll.

Several hundred other children are also now mastering the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic because Craighead and Smithson have chosen the path of service over selfishness.

Albert Einstein once implied that the only reason for human existence was for people to help each other.

In his inspiring book, "Even Eagles Need A Push," David McNally supports Einstein's conclusion. "Life is at its very best when people are willingly and happily contributing to each other."

For those who would shun giving service because of some implied inferior status that it imposes, Dr. Victor Frankl, who survived Hitler's concentration camps, reassured: "One need not be a servant to be able to serve."

Someone has wisely stated that service is the price we pay for the space that we occupy on this planet. But service is not a chore, it is a privilege. And if you want to bask in the company of the most joyful people in the world, just take the time to seek the remaining Mother Teresas and the very busy Mary Craigheads and Sandra Smithsons. When you find them, lend a hand.

*Dr. Michael A. Grant, author of "Beyond Blame," is a motivational/inspirational speaker.*