

COMMENTARY

King's legacy and the consequences of racism

Part 2

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Democratic Party says it has the answer: Racism is on the rise!

The Republicans are going to roll back the civil rights movement! Look what's happening to affirmative action! Don't go anywhere! Stick with us!

But the Democrats — from Bill Clinton on down — are lying.

Racism is ended. It was ended by Dr. King and Malcolm X and millions upon millions of Americans in the 1960s civil rights movement who forced the outlawing of racial discrimination and inequality. That social/political restructuring, for all of the turmoil associated with it, has been accepted by the American people.

The latest surveys show, for example, that a majority of Blacks and Whites agree that legislation to prevent race discrimination is necessary;

that government-funded programs to help minority students prepare to be competitive in college entrance and performance are important; that if two equally qualified candidates are applying to school and one is middle class, the other poor, that the poor applicant should be admitted over the middle class one.

They support government programs to encourage and include minority-owned businesses. (Interestingly, Blacks and Whites part ways on the question of preferential admissions and hiring. Blacks support and Whites oppose "preferences," which means, in essence that they agree on the need to do what's best for their respective interests.)

But while structural racism was dealt with 30 years ago, the consequences of racism have yet to be remedied. Now Black America, politically disillusioned in many ways, and still very poor, is asking: What next?

*This Way
For Black
Empowerment*
By Dr. Lenora Fulani



This was the impulse behind the Million Man March, for example. Likewise, the reduction in violence in poor Black communities is a sign we are trying to contain our rage and get ourselves past the present circumstances.

But the Democrats and Republicans do not want that to happen. They have succeeded in turning the issue of race relations (and all important social issues) into a set of caricatures that prevent any healing and any socio-cultural transformation. It's going to take a broad

independent movement to come up with solutions for post-racist America.

That's why we focus on breaking the control of the Democrats and Republicans. That is the significance of the independent Reform Party, which has growing networks of Blacks participating in its party-building efforts. This is the Fifth American Revolution.

The first overthrew the monarchy in the 1770s. The second overthrew slavery and economic subjugation in the Civil War in the 1860s. The third, in the 1930s, established

greater economic parity and basic rights for working Americans and families. The fourth, in the 1960s, changed the country's attitudes toward race, war and sex — it was a revolution for social equality.

The 1990s brings us to a political revolution against the two parties — to the final frontier for the full emancipation of America.

Ironically, too, this movement takes us back to some of the original conceptions for the founding of our country — life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, a democratic society in which government is of, for and by the people, and a political culture based on development and growth.

In order to achieve this revolution, control over politics and our political culture by the Democrats and Republicans is going to have to be broken. The remedies to inequality that have been created and installed do not, in and of themselves,

guarantee economic growth and the elimination of poverty that could accompany it.

If Black America and all America wants to guarantee economic growth, we're going to have to open up the Pandora's Box of political reform. For two party-ism not only overdetermines and constricts the healing process with respect to race, it overdetermines and constricts the growth process with respect to economic development. To get our hands on these critical processes means getting our hands on the political process through which the country is governed.

What does Black America do now?

It must become a full partner in the fifth American Revolution, in the political restructuring of the country.

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The dilemma of the two Kings

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
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When Martin Luther King III officially took over the reins of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on his father's birthday, Jan. 15, he faced a far different America than did his father.

Forty years earlier as head of the fledgling SCLC, Martin Luther King Jr., promised that Blacks "would struggle and sacrifice until the walls of segregation have been fully crushed by the battering rams of justice."

This simple but eloquent plea for justice firmly staked out the moral high ground for the civil rights movement. It was classic good versus evil.

Many White Americans were sickened by gory news scenes of baton-wielding racist southern sheriffs, firehoses, police dogs and Klan violence unleashed against peaceful Black protesters. Racial segregation was considered by most Americans as immoral and indefensible and the civil rights activists were hailed as martyrs and heroes in the fight for justice.

In the next few years, the torrent of demonstrations, sit-ins, marches and civil rights legislation obliterated the legal barriers of segregation.

But as America unraveled in the 1960s in the anarchy of urban riots, campus takeovers and anti-war street battles, the civil rights movement came apart. It fell victim to its own success and failure.

When it broke down the racially restricted doors of corporations, government agencies and universities, middle class Blacks, not the Black poor, were the ones who scrambled through them.

As King veered toward leftist radicalism and embraced the rhetoric of the militant anti-war movement, he became a political pariah shunned by the White House, liberals and mainstream Black leaders. In the months before his murder King was in mortal danger of being reduced to a tragic symbol of a leader bypassed by the times.

His death was the turning point for race relations in America. The self-destruction from within and political sabotage from without of Black organizations left the Black movement fragmented. Professional skills and training became expendable. Many turned to gangs, guns and drugs to survive.

At the same time, many Whites appalled at Black "lawlessness," bloated Great Society spending and liberal permissiveness, no longer cheered for civil rights. The seeds of the conservative revolt that budded on the surface during the Reagan years exploded in the 1990s with the drumbeat assault on affirmative action and social programs, and the demand for more prisons, police and tougher laws.

King did not see this backward political turn. His son has.

He will have to grapple with the alienation of the Black poor, and the crime, violence and the drug crisis that has sledgehammered many Black communities. He will have to confront the hostility and indifference of many Whites to social programs. He will have to deal with the reality that Latinos and Asians have become major players in the battle for political and economic empowerment and will have to figure out ways to juggle the competing and contradictory needs of other groups and fashion them into a workable coalition with Blacks for change.

He will also have to deal with a volatile issue that his father didn't have to, namely the battle over affirmative action.

At a press conference in November announcing his selection as SCLC leader, King III called on the nation to recommit itself to the dream of a color-blind society. His father repeatedly called for the same thing during his life.

In the context of Jim Crow America of the 1950s and early 1960s, King meant equal opportunity and an end to racial discrimination. Since affirmative action, reverse discrimination and racial preferences had not yet intruded into

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Politicians bungling health care for African-American seniors

By George Wilson
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It is generally assumed that after living or working for a certain period of time, you get to retire.

This time is supposed to be one of minimal stress and security. However, for far too many African-American seniors, it's a road loaded with potholes. This uncertainty is principally rooted in a lack of financial resources.

Samuel Simmons is president of the National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, an organization founded in 1970 as an advocate for the rights of African-American seniors.

Simmons says that African-American seniors have four major areas of concern, but income is the main one.

"As the old people say to me, it's something that you never have enough of. If you've got it, you can buy good housing, you can buy good transportation and good medical services," he said. "The number one issue is always income," Simmons said.

Other areas of concern are health care, housing and living arrangements and basic services such as transportation.

Because some lawmakers recognize the pitfalls that too many senior citizens can fall into, some are attempting to address the situation. Unfortunately, all of their moves don't pass muster.

For example, there was considerable fanfare over the passage of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. Politicians were tripping over each other trying to convince us that finally the nation is being forced to live within its means.

What they didn't talk about was a provision that would make it quite difficult for seniors to arrange for their own tests or procedures that aren't covered by Medicare. What this questionable part of the bill really guarantees is that they can go to any doctor as long as they

have the money to pay for the services. What this seems to indicate is that some doctors won't be so inclined to treat those without money.

This provision essentially forces seniors to pay almost \$3,600 per year for services that Medicare doesn't cover. NCBA and other advocates are concerned about the potential impact of this policy on low-income seniors.

"A lot of people who have been working with firms where they have gone out on health insurance paid for by the employer," Simmons said. "If the employer changes his mind, these people will be left without anything because they are low-income and many of them can't afford to pay \$3,600 per year."

Physicians are placed in a funny position by this law because President Clinton insisted that language which granted freedom of choice to patients be changed to ban any doctor for two years who agrees to provide treatment for non-covered services.

In spite of the staggering figures for prostate cancer among Black men, Medicare is refusing to pay for prostate cancer screenings. This means that those numbers will increase. Perhaps, the cruelest move of all is that those who need oxygen therapy may have difficulty getting this life-preserving treatment.

It certainly is not my intention to scare the elderly. However, they deserve more than some slick talk and punitive laws.

I once read somewhere that you judge a nation by how it treats its children and its elderly. Senior citizens are not political footballs. If the road to happiness is filled with potholes, someone should be trying to fill those holes with appropriate services and some much deserved love.

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