

COMMENTARY

Black political unity key exercising strength

By Dr. Conrad W. Worrill
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Throughout America, numerous statewide, county and local elections are taking place.

In Illinois, for example, more than 95 African-Americans are seeking statewide and county offices, including the secretary of state.

With more than 8,000 African-American elected officials in this country, the question remains why we still have such little political influence and virtually no collective power to address the critical issues facing our communities?

I have stated repeatedly in this column that politics is "the science of who gets what, when, where, and most importantly how." This is an important concept for African people in America to remember.

It is vital because the movement for Black political empowerment in this country should be based on the acquisition of political power.

It should provide what Dr. Anderson Thompson describes as the African principle — "the greatest good for the greatest number of

African people throughout the world."

With the host of political issues facing the African-American community, we need political unity.

The only way for us to gain Black political power in America is to achieve the highest level of unity.

Most African-Americans understand that when our elected representatives do not represent our interests, we do not support them.

Our political leaders must not forget that without the support of the African-American community, their ability to represent us in the attainment of Black political power will be limited.

Group interest in American politics is as old as "apple pie." All ethnic groups in this society who have acquired some measure of political power have done so by sticking together when one of their own runs for a political office.

Irish, Polish, Italians and Jewish groups are all outstanding examples of this in American politics.

Until recently, this has not been the case in

the African-American community. In American politics of this century, African-Americans elected to public office have tended to represent the interest of outside White power groups. This trend needs to change. We should not support those African-Americans seeking political office who engage in this kind of behavior.

It must be repeated that the great political movements and battles that African-American people have taken on since the 1960s have been historic and important to the development of our struggles in America. If we are serious about continuing the fight for Black political empowerment, we will need a new kind of movement throughout the United States.

All African-American people need to take an inventory of the current political scene in terms of how White ethnic groups are fighting to push forward their political agendas. It should be clear that Black people need our own Black political agenda.

The challenge of developing a Black political agenda requires that we take the position of the National Black United Front Constitution which

states we must "delicately formulate the conservative, moderate, reform, radical nationalist and revolutionary concerns into a dynamic agenda, which speaks to our collective interest as a people."

The constitution further suggests, "it is vitally important that our respective organizations, clubs, political factions and individual leaders recognize that none of us (individually) represents the Black community. Collectively considered, however, the various groups and individuals can begin to approximate the general will of the Black community and more reasonably hope to represent the total Black community."

If we follow the ideas presented in the NBUF Constitution our chances will be much greater. All the other White ethnic groups understand this and practice it everyday in their fight to maintain power.

Finally, the words of Frederick Douglas remind us that "Power concedes nothing without a demand, it never did and it never will." Thus, "Without struggle there is no progress."

Burgeoning black teen suicide rate begs solution

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The old folks used to say that black people didn't commit suicide because you couldn't jump out of the basement window. I'm glad the old folks

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



affected by these suicide rates.

The statistics are troubling. But one cannot, I cannot, read them without asking what is causing the

aren't around now as the suicide rate for black teens has more than doubled in the last 15 years.

According to a recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study, suicide is now the third leading cause of death for African-American teenagers, after homicide and accidents. While all the data is not in, the researchers believe that this dramatic increase may reflect the strain some black families are feeling in making the transition to the American middle class.

They believe the pressures of middle class life, coupled with the break-up of traditional black community and family networks and lax religious attitudes may be the culprits.

The starkest increase in suicides among African-American teenagers is found among black males ages 15 to 19, where the suicide rate jumped 146 percent. When added to the high homicide rate for young black men (111 per 100,000), the severity of the problem becomes even clearer. Young black men in the United States are an endangered species.

Most of the African-American male teens who killed themselves did so with guns, the most common weapon for white male teenagers as well. But another study, done at Rush Medical College in Chicago, found that black teens are more likely to kill themselves in the presence of someone else, often a girlfriend or another teenage friend. So, it seems an even greater proportion of African-American teens may be

dilemma.

What overwhelming feeling of hopelessness has so engulfed black male teens that they turn the guns on each other or on themselves? What signals have we as a nation given to these young men that they see no other way to gain self-respect or peace than through homicide or suicide? How can African-Americans reach out to our own children, grandchildren, nephews and neighbors and plant even a seed of hope that may save their lives? How can we reach out to children not in our own neighborhoods, but who need help, nonetheless?

Are middle class African-Americans really providing a better life for our children as we integrate into the larger society unless we also provide those age-old support systems that enabled us to survive slavery and segregation and lynchings and injustice?

I cannot read these statistics about black male teens or hear about white males killing their classmates without asking why our young people have such easy access to guns.

How many people have to die before we as a nation say enough?

We must examine every aspect of our lives, determine where we've failed as adults, teachers, pastors, employers, politicians in raising our children. If our nation is to survive into the 21st century, we must do an about-face and answer serious questions.

We don't have much time.

Task Force

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was "proud of the people [on the task force], fine men and women. I don't know that anybody is 100 percent pleased. I voted against many of the recommendations, but I did sign the majority report."

Thus, the Task Force showed that people of

differing political views, stations in life and even varying attitudes of trust in and mistrust of the police can work together and reduce the high level of tension between police and residents of many urban neighborhoods, especially neighborhoods that are predominately black and Hispanic.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Republicans in a bind on dealing with Clinton

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Republican Party's ineptitude to topple President Clinton from his polls-driven perch is reaching the point of being self-defeating.

On one hand, House Speaker Newt Gingrich and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry J. Hyde draw up plans to try to impeach the president on charges growing out of the sex scandals that recently have hogged the headlines. And on the other hand, GOP leaders in the Senate make a common man's hero out of Clinton by approving on party lines a 1999 budget that rejects the president's call for greater spending on more teachers, job training, school construction, child care and other education initiatives.

Just when it appeared that the president was in his deepest hole on charges of sexual abuse and perjury, Senate leaders enabled him to go before the AFL-CIO in Las Vegas and win a thunderous ovation after speaking like the savior of America's children.

Mr. Clinton already has the GOP in a bind by effectively taking credit for a soaring economy that is supposed to produce a surplus of revenues, and for pressuring the tobacco industry into ponying up billions of dollars to settle complaints about past health ravages of cigarettes and other tobacco products. Now he's goading the GOP into some losing stances about how to use America's new wealth.

President Clinton is proposing to spend \$7.5 billion of the cash windfall over five



CARL ROWAN

years for child care, \$7.3 billion to hire 100,000 new teachers and reduce class size to 18 kids per teacher in kindergarten through the second grade, and \$5 billion for school construction.

But the Senate Budget Committee voted 12-to-10 to reject Clinton's proposals. That

enabled the otherwise beleaguered president to tell his Las Vegas audience, "If the Republican budget says no to new teachers and smaller classes; no to modernizing our schools; no to investing in higher education for our children... the American people should say no to that budget." His mostly blue-collar audience roared in agreement.

Mr. Clinton is now able to say that he and his Democrats have created a financial bonanza but the Republicans want to give it to their fat-cat supporters in tax cuts — or at best they want to plough it into Medicare, the health-insurance program for the non-poor elderly. He again can portray the GOP as the party that cannot support any social program that lifts the level of life of ordinary Americans.

What is at stake in this budget battle is control of both houses of Congress. While Republicans believe that Mr. Clinton's sexual transgressions will drag down most Democratic candidates this fall, the Democrats believe that most Americans care a lot more about education and day care than about the president's relationships with Paula Jones and Kathleen Willey.

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