

COMMENTARY

Gauging black folks 'soul' 100 years after Du Bois

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The theme of Black History Month is taken this year from the observance of the 100th anniversary of the famous book by Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*. What strikes me while reading David Levering Lewis's outstanding work on Du Bois is the parallel between 1903 and today. Du Bois' book partly emerges from his conflict with Booker T. Washington over what kind of education would be best for progress of the race. Washington thought that Blacks would need "practical education" to obtain a vocation. His view of the vocational status of Blacks was consistent with the emerging needs of industrialists in the North for skilled, passive labor. Du Bois, on the other hand, was one of the "new Negroes" in a new century who wanted swift race advancement based on liberal arts collegiate training. His view was that the so-called "talented tenth" would provide the leadership for blacks to achieve equality in mainstream America.

At a deeper level, this well-known conflict was shaped by the power of a conservative movement that in the late 19th Century had fostered the famous doctrine of "separate but equal" in the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* as part of the general attempt to reconcile the white North and white South, but at the expense of blacks. As a result, Blacks were driven out of power in the South, literally, by terroristic methods, such as the rise of the Klan Klux Klan night-riders, who drove

Blacks away from the polls; lynchings, which were at high tide with nearly 100 Blacks murdered each year; and by laws that forced Blacks into a new subordinate status.

Levering writes that Du Bois at first had hesitated to criticize Washington, as some of the radicals like William Montoe Trotter in Boston, Ida B. Wells Barnett and others had. But at last he could not hold back. His book, *The Souls of Black Folks*, was his attack on the conservative movement of his day.

Today, we are living in one of the most conservative periods of history, with the gains won in the Civil Rights Movement under attack every day. I have just learned that Princeton University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology have decided to change their summer programs designed to attract Black students to the study of math and the sciences, opening the programs to all. They are fearful that conservative legal organizations, such as the Center for Individual Rights, will sue them. Just a few weeks prior, the president of the United States announced that he did not support the version of affirmative action used at the University of Michigan. George Bush regarded the award of points for race as a factor in admissions as a "quota" and promoted the "percentage plans" adopted by California, Texas and Florida which all have eliminated affirmative action in college admissions.

However, the Harvard University Civil
(See Walters, Page 14)

Which president showed the most civic courage?

By George E. Curry

Special to Sentinel-Voice

This is Black History Month and Monday was observed as Presidents Day, so I ask: Which president demonstrated the most courage in standing up for African-Americans? John F. Kennedy? Lyndon B. Johnson? Jimmy Carter? Bill Clinton?

My vote is for none of the above. I cast my ballot for the plain-spoken and outspoken president from Missouri — Harry S. Truman.

Yes, Truman. Unlike today's Democrats, he was willing to take bold action on behalf of desegregating the military and the federal workforce at a time when his Republican opponents controlled both the House and Senate. Truman advisers feared that he was committing political suicide by being so supportive of African-Americans.

Truman's support of civil rights is chronicled in an excellent book, "Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks," by Michael R. Gardner.

Published by Southern Illinois University Press in Carbondale, the book jacket notes, "Given his background, President Truman was an unlikely champion of civil rights. Where he grew up — the border state of Missouri — segregation was accepted and largely unquestioned. Both his maternal and paternal grandparents had owned slaves, and his mother, victimized by Yankee forces, railed against Abraham Lincoln for the remainder of her ninety-four years."

Yet, Truman was able to rise above his

background. He told a NAACP gathering in 1947, "We can no longer afford the luxury of a leisurely attack upon prejudice and discrimination. We cannot, any longer, await the growth of a will to action in the slowest state or the most backward community. Our national government must show the way."

In many ways, a reflective look at Truman gives us a richer context in which to view retired Sen. Strom Thurmond's decision (with Trent Lott's belated approval) to bolt the Democratic Party in 1948 because it adopted a desegregation plank offered by then-Minneapolis Mayor Hubert H. Humphrey.

Writing to his sister, Mary Jane, on June 28, 1947, the day before he was to address the NAACP, Truman said: "I've got to make a speech for the Advancement of Colored People and I wish I didn't have to make it 'Mama won't like what I say because I wind up by quoting old Abe. But I believe what I say and I'm hopeful we may implement it.'"

In his speech, Truman vowed an immediate attack on segregation, a policy favored by many powerful Southerners in his party. The 12-minute speech, broadcast live on the four major radio networks in prime time, marked the first time a United States president had pledged his full support for civil rights.

A Gallup poll conducted six months later showed 82 percent of Americans opposed Truman's civil rights program. But

(See Curry, Page 14)

'Minority' programs keep us fighting over 15 percent

By James Clingman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

You have probably heard the term "economic inclusion" being bantered about lately, so here's another question while we're at it. Who is doing the including? Who are they including? How does a public project, or one funded with public dollars, come under the authority of a White contractor or developer who, in turn, has the right to "include" a certain percentage of "minorities?" Why is it that White men, for the most part, are always the ones doing the "including" and "minorities" are always the ones being included, to the tune of an average of 15 percent of the pie?

What about the 85 percent of the contracting, the employment, the development and the tourism dollars? Who gets that? And, what entitles them to get it?

Isn't it amazing that we continue to fall for the games people play on us? In Cincinnati, Ohio, my hometown, a

disparity study (Croson Study) stated very clearly that Black people and other groups had been discriminated against via city contracting opportunities. What happens? Well, the city council voted to implement a "race-neutral" program, laced with a few small percentage goals, to make up for past discrimination. Mind you, the problem was based on race, but the solution was race-neutral.

We have all sorts of "minority" programs that call for goals, aspirations, goods intentions, hopes, wishes, and have encouraging words attached to them. However, they all center on a relatively small percentage of a particular project; that 15 percent (a little more in some cases) is designated for a so-called minority group. Now check this out. The designated minority group, sometimes comprising as many as five or six individual groups, collectively, often has greater numbers than the so-called majority that is given the right to "in-

clude" minorities in public projects.

Does this make sense to you? Does it make sense for Black people to, first, allow ourselves to be called "minorities," and then allow a group of White men to dominate and control our tax dollars to the point that we end up fighting for 15 percent? Why are we competing with other groups for the "minority" share of our tax dollars and allowing the other 85 percent to escape into the hands of White men?

Maybe we should look at the percentages of population or the aggregate number of "minorities" in various areas, and base our economic inclusion efforts on that. Once again, I draw your attention to my hometown. We are building the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center for more than \$100 million. The "goal" for minority inclusion is 25 percent. The Black population is nearly 50% and Hispanics and Asians comprise be-

tween 5 percent and 7 percent.

First of all, the last time I read my history, the players in the Underground Railroad in Cincinnati, Ohio, were Black folks and White folks, not "minorities." I never learned about a Chinese person swimming or walking across the Ohio River, or a Latino person, or a person from India or Pakistan participating, either by running from slave-catchers or helping slaves escape. That being the case, why then are "minorities" the focus of the Freedom Center's Economic Inclusion Program?

And where is the rule that says White men and women must always be the ones who determine how much everyone else will get? The same thing applies when it comes to other minority programs. Black people are the ones who were discriminated against, but everyone else has stepped up to get the benefits of our pain and suffering. We're gettin' played, y'all!

While we are scrambling to get our share of the 15 percent allotment, others are getting the 85 percent without the slightest problem. And to make it even worse, Black people have to comply with so-called minority set-aside regulations and horrendous "certification" programs to get a share of such a small piece of the pie. How can you call me and treat me "special" and make me jump through five hoops to get a contract, while White men don't have to jump through any hoops, yet they get the lion's share of public funds and development opportunities? They keep our attention diverted toward 15 percent and they get away with 85 percent in the process.

I can hear the detractors now, saying, "What about the fact that Black people do not have the professional and business capacity to perform even if they were given a greater percentage?"

While it's true there are far too few Black businesses

whose annual receipts are far too low, that fact makes the case for more "access" to opportunity, information, education and capital. It makes the case for Black businesses to form partnerships, mergers, and alliances to capture a larger share of the proverbial pie. It makes a case for those in control to spend some of that 85 percent on the things that will enhance the opportunities for Black business development. (Maybe that's what George Bush means by that nonsensical term "affirmative access," no doubt following in his father's footsteps, or missteps, when he coined the term, "a thousand points of light.")

Brothers and sisters, let's stop fighting over a share of the 15 percent set aside for "minorities," and start fighting for more of the 85 percent.

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