

C O M M E N T A R Y

Eco-terrorism waged against Blacks in Maryland

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When one Black man, James Byrd was crushed to death by White racist in Texas, it caused an uproar; when Amadou Diallo was killed in a hail of gun bullets in New York, it was a national exposé; in 1992, when Rodney King was beaten senseless by the LAPD, it caused a massive rebellion. But at 5:A.M. on December 6, fires broke out in the Hunters Brook neighborhood in Charles County, a new housing development in Southern Maryland, that gutted 12 homes and damaged 42 in a \$10 million holocaust, there is little reaction and no national outrage.

I wonder why a hate crime that involved torching houses, the largest arson case in recent American history, has attracted so little attention?

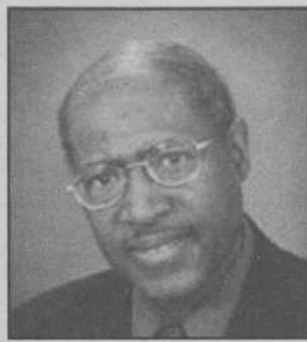
I watched with interests as the media — cable news spots, some mention on the major television networks, and others — reported the incident, but then dropped it. And I wondered when the major civil rights organizations would investigate an incident where most of those who lived in the new homes were Black. Little action has occurred raising questions about these fires. It has mostly been left to the local media, the local police and the justice Department. Maybe we have been too fixated on the outcome of the recent elections

to care about these brothers and sisters. Or maybe they just want to have their homes built and get on with their lives.

Immediately the media posited two motives for the fires, one was something that I had never heard of called "eco-terrorism" which was an attempt to align this incident to the current fear that we are still under attack. The second reason was that some disgruntled, or deranged person had set them. How could one person have done this? Most importantly, how could people raised in America be so silent about the fact that this incident was squarely in the tradition of American terrorism against Blacks?

Of course, no one began such speculation — which they do all the time — and all of the Black reporters were either asleep or on Christmas vacation.

Perhaps I was sensitive to this because I passed through Southern Maryland on my way to a summer place in Virginia on the banks of the Potomac River, and on those trips, I noticed how the Black population was pushing South into the historic preserve of many rural Southern Whites. Many times, I wondered what would happen when the thun-



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derous movement of the Black working class, some of whom were now affluent, pushed out of the adjacent Prince George's County and on down further South where Blacks were in the minority, but where the echos of Southern attitudes are still distinct.

Working class Whites had moved out of Prince George's County because of the influx

of Blacks from the District of Columbia, making PG county the largest collection of affluent Blacks in the world. Whites had pushed on to Calvert County and South into Charles County, a place where slavery was a widespread practice, and where they were making their last stand to preserve what many had sought — a majority White social and cultural geographical space. But here came the brothers and sisters, looking to build more decent housing and wanting to do without a long commute.

This movement fueled the resentment that was the fuel for the combustion that led to the decision and the planning to torch Blacks out of their space. At this writing, the "eco-terrorism" theory has been scrapped, and something more familiar has been instituted as a motive, and a conspiracy of White males

has begun to be unraveled.

This racial terrorism was the stuff that torched nearly 100 or so Black churches in the mid-1990s, so many that it led to an investigation by the U. S. Civil Rights Commission. And because they were still doing that in 2000, it sparked a discussion of having a serious hate crimes bill.

While we should respect the feelings of those who want to note the incident and move on, the problem is that moving on smacks of sweeping racism under the rug on the one hand, and on the other, buying into the conservative rhetoric of the Rush Limbaugh's and more sophisticated conservatives, such as Gerald Reynolds and Abigail Thernstrom, the new leaders of the U. S. Civil Rights Commission, and others, that racism is dead, that we don't need a strong hate crimes laws.

The FBI has taken an interest in the case and if things work out, it will be the first major test on racial issues of the new Hispanic Attorney General. Let's see how George Bush, the "compassionate conservative," treats this. In the meantime, I don't want to hear from my Black brothers and sisters that old-time racism is dead, or that we don't need to keep fighting the newer forms.

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Black church is complicit in besmirching integration

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice
Second of a two-part series

In last week's article, we posed some questions regarding integration in churches, both congregationally and administratively. As today's national political discussion centers on "separation of church and state," let's think about possible motivations for what has become the "separation of church and church."

The largest "mixed" congregations are led by White ministers. While you may see Whites sitting in churches run by Black ministers, their numbers pale in comparison to those of Black people attending White-dominated churches. (As matter of fact, there was one Black church that paid Whites folks to come to its service.) So-called "mega churches," both Black and White, have multi-million dollar budgets, and have assets in the tens of millions, all controlled by one man, a man and his wife, or a small team of insiders who are not the least bit interested in integration, beyond that of everyone integrating their offerings in the same collection basket, of course.

Was integration planned in such great detail that Black folks fell for the biggest scam in American history? Were we so myopic about owning our church buildings and maintaining our church titles and status that we missed what was happening to our social, economic, political, and educational status? Could it have been, as the Church Lady used to say, "Satan"? Or was it, as I always say, "Money"? I think I have an answer to this one. It was both Satan and money.

The "hostile takeover" called integration, to which we eventually succumbed, has put Black people in a very untenable position. Stable Black churches outnumber viable Black businesses, and Black churches control more unencumbered funds than Black

businesses. While some churches are building businesses and creating employment, the majority of Black churches simply serve as transfer agents for Black dollars, moving billions from their coffers to those of non-Black businesses.

Many members of Black churches across this land only have the "pleasure" of seeing and sitting in an edifice built to celebrate a pastor. Many members who have their own businesses never receive business from the churches their dollars helped to build. History shows that as integration expanded and grew more acceptable, Black churches started landing on Boardwalk and Park Place with phenomenal regularity, and they didn't mind because they could pay the rent. Then, they even started buying that exclusive and expensive real estate. Church integration? I don't think so. That was one place we had it going on, and we were not about to allow anyone to infringe on that sacred ground. Whites weren't either.

White folks sat back and watched as our churches grew in number and size, waiting for the calls that would inevitably come for them to sell us their land, construct our buildings, and then sell us everything we needed to furnish our churches. (After all, we had all but abandoned our furniture-making, printing, and robe-making businesses because integration gave us the right to use theirs.) Whites maintained control of their church resources, never having to share them with those "Integration now!" demonstrators, and they laughed on the way to their banks every Monday morning; they couldn't wait to see how much money Black churchgoers had dropped into their night deposit vaults.



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The result of not integrating our churches along with everything else surely contributed to our economic demise and brought even more economic resources to White people. If churches had been included in the integration game, aside from the spiritual benefits that would have accrued, maybe Black construction companies would have won some of those White church-building contracts;

maybe more Black banks would have stayed in business by financing some of those White churches; and maybe the Black economy would now be on firmer footing because of all the money harbored in Black and White churches. Maybe integration should have been an all-or-nothing agreement — a real merger, rather than an acquisition.

A final thought. Could the reluctance of many "religious" Whites to stand up and speak about blatant acts of discrimination and mistreatment against Blacks, something I see in my hometown everyday, be attributed to our not having integrated our churches?

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taxpayers' pockets. He dumps on poor people and accuses them of being unaccountable. Yet, when he's caught taking taxpayers money to help spread propaganda, he pretends to not know that he was doing anything wrong.

But let's not stop with Armstrong. The belief by Education Department officials, including former Secretary Rod Paige, that Armstrong Williams or any other Black conservative could sway Black public opinion in Bush's favor — even for \$240,000 — is laughable. On a good day, Black Republicans represent 10 percent of African-Ameri-

There is no outcry in Cincinnati from White churches about Nathaniel Jones, Roger Owensby, or what happened to 500 Black families who were put out of their homes. (Not a huge outcry from Black churches, either) Is there an outcry from White churches in Columbus, Ga. about Kenneth Walker's death? Hey, no integration, no obligation. Right?

As I said, I don't know all the answers to the questions I posed. Yet, I do see the results of our not having done some of the things noted above. The point is merely to get you to think and to rethink our integration strategy, if we still have one, because I agree with Lomax's assessment when he said, "Integration is slowly burying us as we become more politically and financially impotent." I think it was a trick, a game that we lost. Maybe if Black folks had not been so enamored with mixing every resource — except churches — with those owned by White people, we could have played a few tricks of our own, and we could have won the game. Agree?

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cans and they can only get elected to Congress from districts that are at least 90 percent White. If Bush administration officials were going to hire Armstrong to sway anyone, it should have been to influence White conservatives.

But that would make too much sense. This fiasco isn't about common sense or ethics. Instead, it's about rewarding Black conservatives for carrying the GOP's water and making sure if Republicans are ever out of power, no money will be left behind.

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