

# Are third-party politics best future for Blacks?

By Charles Hallman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice  
MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. - If change is indeed to come in this country, citizens must stop looking for it from present leaders, a 2004 presidential candidate said.

David Cobb, running for the Green Party, received only one-tenth of a percent of the votes in the 2004 presidential general election. According to the Federal Election Commission, based on campaign money spent, Cobb topped all candidates, including incumbent President George W. Bush (almost \$5) and Democratic hopeful John Kerry (\$4.09), with an expenditure of barely a dollar (\$1.01) a vote.

In the last two general elections, numerous voting problems occurred, particularly in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004. Does the current system of electing officials need refining or overhauling? Do citizens' votes really count? These are questions Cobb raised during his June 2 visit to the Twin Cities.

"It's about fundamental fairness," he said. "If we are to have any confidence in the election process, we need to be sure that we democratize

elections in this country." Cobb first got involved in politics as a college student and said, "My first engagement in politics was as a student organizer enforcing the University of Houston to divest its holdings in companies that did business with that racist, oppressive regime [apartheid] in South Africa," he recalled.

He later worked on Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988 and former California Governor Jerry Brown's in 1992.

"I learned a lot from those campaigns," said Cobb. "I learned how to put myself under the leadership of people of color and women."

He also learned that there's not much difference between the two major U.S. political parties, which ultimately led him to the Greens. "They try to stack the deck against us," said Cobb of both Republicans and Democrats.

He believes that a nonpartisan form of government might be a better way, especially in such matters as redistricting and elections. "I don't think a Democrat or a Republican [should] be in charge," Cobb pointed out. "I don't think a Green should be

in charge. It would be better [for] nonpartisan boards." Among their key planks, the Green Party platform includes a Constitutional Right to Vote, guaranteed voter-verified paper ballots for all voting machines, and re-enfranchising of ex-felons.

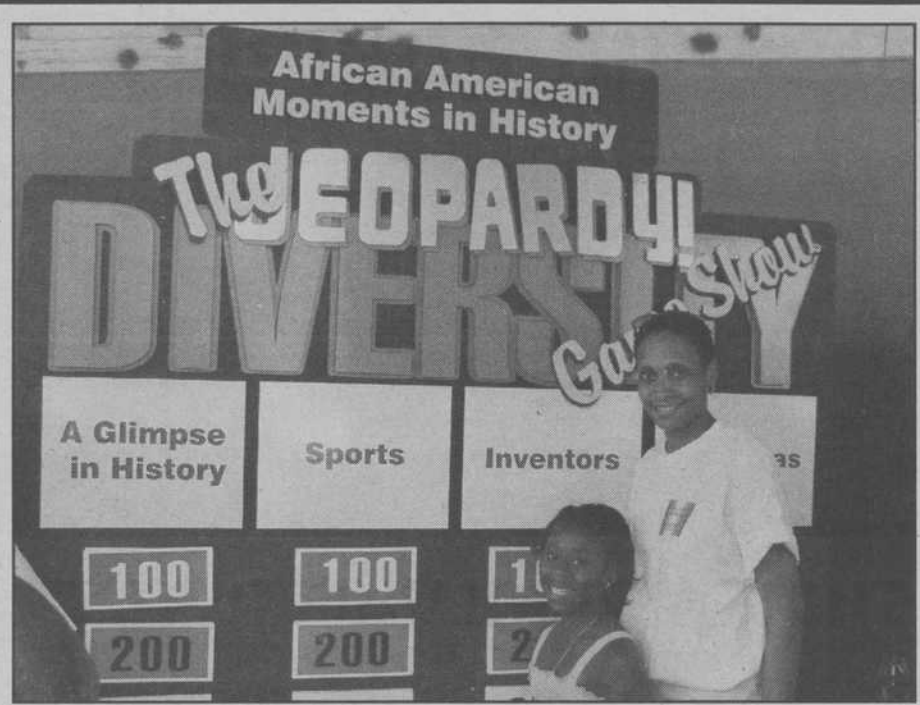
Cobb also encourages all citizens to get involved "and be part of a long-term movement" — especially appealing to persons of color who either feel disenfranchised or virtually ignored by both major parties.

Cobb offered two reasons for Blacks to join the Greens. First, his party is the only political party actively seeking reparations for slavery. "That's reconciliation, justice and fairness," he said. Secondly, he asks Blacks to evaluate closely their past voting.

"You are not going to get change just by voting every two or four years," Cobb explained. "If you want change in this country, and you don't bother to vote for candidates calling for change, you are wasting a great opportunity."

Cobb believes that a real grassroots effort for political change must come from the people, not politicians.

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**HISTORICAL CELEBRATION**  
(Top photo) African-American history serves as the basis for a Jeopardy-style game provided by the MGM MIRAGE Corporation at Saturday's annual Juneteenth festival at the Sammy Davis Jr. Festival Plaza at Lorenzi Park. (Bottom photo) Roosevelt and Patricia Davis enjoy the festivities. Sentinel-Voice photos by Les Pierres Streater

## KKK

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charges in the case by the state of Mississippi.

Killen, a part-time preacher and sawmill operator, was tried in 1967 on federal charges of violating the victims' civil rights. But the all-White jury deadlocked, with one juror saying she could not convict a preacher. Seven others were convicted, but none served more than six years.

The trial moved along swiftly, with testimony over only four days. Many of the witnesses from the 1967 trial are dead; this time, their testimony was read aloud to the jury from the transcripts.

Chaney, a Black Mississippian, and Goodman and Schwerner, White New Yorkers, were in Neshoba County to look into the torching of a Black church and help register Black voters during what was called Freedom Summer.

The three were stopped for speeding on the night of the attack, jailed briefly, and then released, after which they were followed out of town by a gang of Klansmen and intercepted.

Witnesses — primarily Klansmen — testified that Killen was a local Klan organizer who led meetings where members discussed the "elimination" of Schwerner, whom they called "Goatee" because of his beard.

Witnesses said on the day of the slayings, Killen drove about 35 miles to Meridian and rounded up carloads of Klansmen to intercept the three men in their station wagon.

According to testimony, Killen told some Klansmen to get plastic gloves and helped arrange for a bulldozer to bury the bodies in an earthen dam.

Killen's case marked the latest attempt in the Deep South to deal with unfinished business from the civil rights era.

In 1994, Mississippi won the conviction of Byron de la Beckwith for the 1963 sniper killing of state NAACP leader Medgar Evers.

In Alabama, Bobby Frank Cherry was convicted in 2002 of killing four Black girls in the bombing of a Birmingham church in 1963 — the deadliest attack of the civil rights era. In 2001, Thomas Blanton was convicted in the bombing.

State prosecutors also have reopened an investigation into the 1955 slaying of Chicago teenager Emmett Till in the Mississippi Delta. Till was kidnapped from his uncle's home after being accused of whistling at a White woman. Three days later, the 14-year-old's mutilated body was found in a river. Earlier this month, his remains were exhumed and autopsied.

In the case against Killen, prosecutors told jurors that a conviction was crucial in showing the world that times have changed in Mississippi.

"Because the guilt of Edgar Ray Killen is so clear, there is only one question left," prosecutor Mark Duncan said. "Is a Neshoba County jury going to tell the rest of the world that we are not going to let Edgar Ray Killen get away with murder any more? Not one day

more." Defense attorney James McIntyre urged the jury to "vote your conscience" and acquit Killen. "There is a reasonable doubt," the lawyer said.

The bald, gray-haired Killen was brought into court each day in a wheelchair — the result of a logging accident in which he broke his legs. Killen had to be taken from the courthouse in a stretcher last week to be treated for high blood pressure — the same day that Schwerner's widow took the stand.

Rita Schwerner Bender took a riveted courtroom back in time to 1964, when she

and her husband stayed in Mississippi with Black families but had to constantly move around because of threats against their lives.

She also recalled the day when she was told that authorities had found the burned-out shell of her husband's blue station wagon in a swamp.

"I think it really hit me for the first time that they were dead, that there was really no realistic possibility that they were alive," Bender said, occasionally looking as though she was fighting back tears. A few in the courtroom wiped away tears during the testimony.

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