

Blacks, Latinos start to bridge ethnic divide

By Ron Walters
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Two events in recent weeks have brought Blacks and Hispanics closer together than ever before. One is the recent mayoral election in Los Angeles, Calif., and the other is the racist remarks of Vicente Fox, the president of Mexico.

The election in LA on May 17 featured a victory by the Hispanic candidate, Antonio Villaraigosa, over Anglo James Hahn, in a repeat contest of four years ago, which Hahn won. While in the previous election Blacks voted for Hahn by 80 percent, this time they gave him only 52 percent, splitting their vote between the two.

The Black increase for Villaraigosa was the largest among all groups, with Whites and Asians increasing their vote for the winner by 9 percent, but Blacks by 28 percent. Hispanics, however, made up 25 percent of the total vote and contributed 84 percent to Villaraigosa. So, while the movement was in the direction of the Hispanic candidate by all voters, the predominant feature of the coalition was Black and Hispanic.

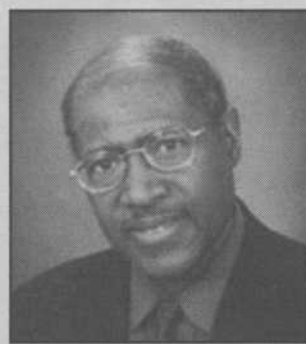
For some time, analysts have wondered when a Black and Hispanic coalition would materialize, and some thought that it would do so in the 2002 election in Texas that featured the so-called "dream team" of a Black candidate for Senate, Ron Kirk, and the Hispanic Tony Sanchez for Governor. However,

it was not to be.

California, however, is the next big step on the road to coalition, not only because two of five Blacks voted for Villaraigosa because Hahn fired the popular Black LA Police Chief Bernard Parks, but also because Black districts in LA are home to growing numbers of Latinos.

For example, Maxine Waters led the break-away from Hahn to Villaraigosa, and her Congressional District is now 47.4 percent Hispanic. That is not unusual, since the Districts of other Black members of Congress, such as Juanita Millender McDonald is 44 percent Latino and that of Diane Watson is 35 percent Hispanic. What the coalition means is that rather than these Black members being forced out, given some favorable support by Hispanic politicians for redistricting, they may be able to hold out for a period longer. Eventually, however, these districts may become majority Hispanic and the route to retaining Black political power is not to foster animosity in the transition, but to practice the kind of statesmanship that builds a transition of solidarity around common issues.

The other event was one that found President Vicente Fox stating, in response to Bush's immigration policy, that Mexicans



RON WALTERS

were going to the United States to take jobs "that even Blacks wouldn't take." Immediately Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., then, Rev. Al Sharpton, flew to Mexico to demand an apology from Fox who has arrogantly refused to provide one.

The issue of Hispanic immigrants taking up certain jobs is sensitive, because in some industries, such as construction or hotels and restaurants, it is so damaging to Blacks that one remembers the old sign, "No Blacks Need Apply." Indeed, labor statistics show that in the five years between 1985 and 1990, the deepest drop in Black employment was in the construction and mechanical work type (from 9 percent to 6 percent); between 1990 and 2000, the deepest drop was in Black service workers (from 23 percent to 20 percent.).

While it has been popular among progressives to point to the failure of Bush's immigration policy to stop the flow of undocumented workers to the U. S., criticism of his proposal announced in January 2004 is worse, even by conservatives. Briefly, it allows for temporary workers to have a permit to stay in the country and work legally until the period of their employment ends. They are able to get a green card legally, but undocumented workers will not be granted

amnesty; they must return. Their status can be renewed, but American workers must be offered such employment first.

Many have pointed out that such a policy merely legitimizes the flow of illegal immigration to the United States, in a manner that allows farmers and other corporations to benefit from cheap labor. Such a flow of immigration will continue to put substantial pressure on Blacks who are the logical competitors with Hispanics for low-end jobs, especially. While Fox and Bush have both used the theme that only jobs that Americans won't take would be offered to immigrants, I have yet to hear them complete the sentence: "...jobs that Americans won't take... for the lowest wages, that is.

The potential may be for Blacks to blame Hispanics increasingly for such a policy rather than blame those who hold open the door, utilize the cheap labor and make untold profits in the process. That is why Blacks and Hispanic organizations, such as the Mexican Legal Defense Fund and others, have recently announced a coalition to fight for a fair immigration policy. I agree with Bush on one thing: "The best way to reduce the pressure that creates illegal immigration in the first place is to expand economic opportunity." But you can't do that and vigorously outsource jobs at the same time.

Ron Walters is the director of the African-American Leadership Institute.

NAACP

(Continued from Page 4)
organization during the NAACP annual convention in Milwaukee July 9-14.

"I want to make sure that we acknowledge what we have and that we put plans in place to utilize what we have. That's not to say that we will not continue to pursue expanded power in every dimension, but we have more control over our communities than we exercise. We have more control over the use of resources than we exercise," he said.

A key to that control is America's \$700 billion Black buying power, Gordon said.

"The question is: Do we use that buying power to the best advantage of our communities?" he explained. "We have tremendous giving power. Do we give to our community? Do we invest in the NAACP? Do we invest in our cultural institutions? Do we invest in our schools? We graduate...thousands of students from historically Black colleges and universities around the country. But, if you look at the giving rate of HBCU grads to their alma maters in comparison to the giving rate of the other community, to their alma mater, we don't compete. We don't compare."

That's not the only thing Gordon wants to change.

"The AIDS epidemic in our community is huge and

growing," he said. "I think that most AIDS experts would tell you that the best solution to AIDS is prevention, and the best mechanism for prevention is education. That says, if every Black church in America got engaged in AIDS education, in AIDS testing, that if every organization like ours that has an audience and has a network of chapters and branches got involved in disseminating information about AIDS, we, all by ourselves, could improve upon that epidemic in our community."

These self-help strategies by the Black community will not replace traditional civil rights strategies such as marching, he said.

"I think that marching can be effective, but I want to make sure that we use all of the tools in our kit," Gordon said. "Now, should we march? No question about it. But, should we think or review marching as our primary mechanism? I don't think so. I think that there are other ways to influence."

Gordon, 59, did not participate in the 1963 March on Washington and other major civil rights marches of the 60s.

"In terms of activism, you will not find on my resume, a long list of what I call traditional activism," he said. "You will find on my resume,

a very long list of 21st century activism. And that is what's going to move us, I think, ahead, in the future."

Gordon has the success credentials to show for his style of activism.

Among his honors for his push for corporate diversity, *Fortune* magazine named him one of the "50 Most Powerful Black Executives" in July 2002, and *Black Enterprise* magazine named him "Executive of the Year" in 1998 for his work at Verizon, formerly Bell Atlantic.

"...He has scaled the corporate ladder with a dexterity only a select few have mastered," *Black Enterprise* described Gordon in the article honoring him in 1998. "He is also a champion of corporate diversity and a tireless catalyst in moving African-Americans up the ranks at Bell Atlantic."

Gordon takes the helm of the NAACP just as several major civil rights marches and African-American movements are being planned. He said he plans to attend Jesse Jackson Sr.'s August 6 march commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act in Atlanta and Minister Louis Farrakhan's Millions More Movement in October.

He is less certain whether he will participate in the "Back to Gary" movement

next March that will explore different political options.

"In my mind, I'm not concerned about what side of the aisle you're on or whether you need to create yet another party," he said. "I'm concerned about African-Americans expressing themselves, involving themselves, educating themselves, informing themselves, that they know the issues, and then they take whatever

stance that makes sense to them. We're not all the same. We don't all think alike. I respect diversity of thought. What I respect most is engagement."

Meanwhile, Gordon said he will bring the dexterity that he used at Verizon to the NAACP.

"I've had accountability for leading very substantial organizations inside of corporate America. And in lead-

ership, I believe that I will be able to communicate effectively;

I believe that I will be able to organize effectively," he said.

"Businesses talk about return on investments. I want a return on every dollar we invest in a program, in an initiative — whatever. So, just having that kind of a managerial attitude and perspective, I think, will be useful to the NAACP at this point in time."

Clingman

(Continued from Page 11)

Cato started to cite points he had read from the case, and I sat there waiting for him to get to the good part; you know, the part where he says, "Call your witnesses." Ah yeah, any minute now, I thought. My 12-year-old daughter was with me; I wanted her to see justice in action, and I wanted her to see what can happen to a Black man once he gets caught up in "the system."

As the judge continued to speak, something in his voice and his legal jargon suggested he had already made up his mind, even though he had sworn in the witnesses, even though they had spent William's money to bring the two perpetrators to Morgan, Ga., and even though William's attorneys had hundreds — maybe thousands — of documents to share during their presentation. This guy had already made up his mind. He was about to do something that would let everyone know that slavery was still in effect and that he was the master, the one in charge.

Cato ended his brief statements by slamming his gavel down and walking out of the courtroom, leaving in his wake a stunned crowd, a shocked attorney standing there with her mouth wide open wondering what just

happened, and a grieving mother who was not even allowed to hug her son.

William was literally man-handled and shoved out of the courtroom without the opportunity to speak one word, to call his witnesses, or to state his case. Thirteen years to get a hearing, but only 10 minutes to deny it. Justice? Yeah, right.

What we saw that day reminded me of that little word in the 13th Amendment: "except." My daughter was traumatized by what she saw; her heart went out to William and his mother.

"Why was that judge so mean, Daddy?" she asked. "Why did they push William the way they did?" she questioned further. "They would not even let him see his mother. Why, Dad?"

We talked about it on our way out of Morgan, Ga., a town that, now that I have written this, I had better stay away from for fear that Judge Cato will make a slave out of me. Pray for William's release, and send some money to his defense fund. See www.freemayo.com for more information.

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