

# Summit

(Continued from Page 1) about 32 percent, and White families were at 8 percent. Currently, the percentage of Black families living below the poverty line has dropped only slightly to 27 percent (a 16 percent decrease over 32 years) as the percentage of White families in poverty has remained unchanged.

This year's National Black Peoples Unity Convention featured dozens of high-profile speakers who grappled with difficult issues, including poverty, education, social justice.

"We're in bad shape now, but we would have been in much worse shape had we not gotten all of those Black elected officials," said former Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher, elected the first Black mayor of a major U.S. city in 1967. Hatcher was one of three chairs of this year's conference, held at West Side High School, just as was the case in 1972.

"The reason we're not in better shape as a result of increasing the number of Black elected officials, is that at some point, we reached a state of saying, 'As long as it's a Black. If we could just elect a Black to that office, we have succeeded.' We have not succeeded," says Hatcher. "You can not elect just any old Black just like you can't elect just any old White. You've got to elect people who have committed to the community and who have committed to finding solutions to the problems that our people have."

He explains, "Many of the Blacks who were elected to office as a result of the conference in '72 and the efforts of others, have what I call the 'Clarence Thomas syndrome.' They feel that they are there, not because they had any support and backing from their own community, but because they're so intelligent. And, so, as a consequence, they feel no obligation, no responsibility to reach back and help our people. So having them in office is no different than having Whites in office."

During his 20 years as mayor, Hatcher became known for his innovative approaches to urban problems and was a spokesman for civil rights, racial justice and the poor.

But, like Gary, which was a thriving industrial city before Hatcher's election, even race-conscious Black mayors have found themselves helpless in the face of a tax base that plummets because of the



Sentinel-Voice photo by Bob Williams/St. Louis  
Former Colorado Lt. Gov. George Brown during a speech.

flight of White and middle class Blacks to the suburbs.

"The industrial base shifts and then there is suburban flight," said former presidential candidate Jesse Jackson Sr., the keynote speaker at the opening of the event.

"So, you lose jobs and you lose the tax base, you lose the education base no matter who is the mayor. It is the shifting of the economy that's had an impact upon the cities... The Black mayor of Detroit does not determine the automotive industrial shifts. The Black mayor of Gary doesn't determine the steel industrial shifts, so there is no correlation between those positions and what's happening to America."

With voter participation nearly 6 percent higher than before the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, former Colorado Lt. Gov. George Brown, the first Black elected lieutenant governor, blames voter apathy for the lack of progress.

"Black people have been very, very unmoving. We haven't motivated ourselves. We've been divided. We didn't look to economic empowerment as we suggested we had to," says Brown. "We've got to get out, learn how to make money, learn how to make it work for us, learn how to share it and reach back... Hopefully, when we come out of here, we will have a road map and lay out curves, hills, obstacles and we'll have the prescription to get over them with unity."

Organizers of the Gary II summit, which drew approximately 700 participants to the high school gym, had apparently hoped to leave the city with a "road map."

But a synopsis of the convention and specific plans of

action that came out of it will not be available for weeks after they are approved by a steering committee, explained political scientist Ron Walters, one of the 1972 organizers and director of the African-American Leadership Institute at the University of Maryland-College Park.

"There is a draft agenda. It does exist... It contains, both a brief summary of the event and recommendations. Those recommendations are addressed to two audiences," said Walters. "One, recommendations addressed to the Black community, and two, recommendations addressed to the government and corporate structure."

Bill Lucy, president and co-founder of the Coalition

of Black Trade Unionists, called for the second Gary convention last June. In an interview then, he expressed frustration with a lack of respect from the Democratic Party and powerful labor interests and said it was time to re-establish a firm Black agenda from the grassroots on up. Organizers announced that Lucy was ill and unable to make last week's convention.

Though resolutions were not readily available, a string of speakers, considered to be "heavy hitters" for civil and social rights in America, offered dozens of solutions.

Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan encouraged Black people to reject dependency on government and White economic systems and do for themselves.

"Politics without economics is symbol without substance," Farrakhan told the lively audience, restating a proposal for a "ministry of education" first made during his Millions More Movement last fall.

"We could develop a new system of education that would not only free our people, but free Hispanics, free Native Americans and free the poor White people who are still languishing under this kind of racist, White supremacist, messed up educational system," he stated. "Do we have the courage to sit down in a room and craft an educational system that will serve the intellectual needs of our children and

other children?"

Economist Maya Rockey Moore also stressed the importance of education.

"They're outsourcing jobs — not to people who are street-sweepers. They're outsourcing jobs to people who are educated," Rockey Moore says. "In India, there are people who have been educated in America who have gone back to do the jobs that used to be here... We need to be prepared to compete globally."

Charles Steele Jr., president and chief executive officer of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said African-Americans must instill pride — not shame — into children about struggles that Blacks have suffered and conquered. "They think that everything is supposed to be done by a magic wand," Steele said. "You are ashamed of your past and you won't tell it to the young folks... The Trans-Atlantic Africa slave trade, that's something you ought to be proud of because it was the worse inhumane treatment of any group of people. And guess what? We survived. The Jews had a holocaust. But, we had a helocaust."

Still, as a part of their own liberation, African-Americans must reach beyond themselves to build coalitions with others who are also suffering, said Maulana Karenga, founder of Kwanzaa and chairman of the Black Studies Department at California State University-Long Beach.

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"It upholds the right of Africa to be free and our responsibility to assist them, to criticize the unjust war in Iraq," says Karenga. "We must support the liberation of Palestine and its people... We must also support the right of Iraqis to rule themselves and especially long-suffering Haiti."

Black people must also return to righteous indignation, says the Rev. Joseph Lowery, who co-founded the SCLC with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"The power in the movement that changed America came out of moral commitment," said Lowery. "And we have deserted the good spouse of spirituality and we're shacking up with prostitutes of greed and materialism. That's an incestuous affair. And like all incestuous affairs, it breeds offspring with congenital defects."

Perhaps the greatest challenge came from Bruce Gordon, president and CEO of the NAACP:

"You've clapped your hands, you've laughed a bit. But if all you do is that and don't walk out of here with a plan and a commitment, no matter how good those speeches were, they are not worth the paper they were written on. This is not about speeches. This is about action. They gave you incentives, motivations, concepts and ideas. The question is, what are we going to do?"

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