Volume 24, No. 4 April 1996

FOCUS

The monthly magazine of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Ron Brown's Message on Change and Hope

Before His Death, One of the Nation's Premiere Conciliators Urged Black Leaders to Remain at the Center of America's Moral Struggles

AIDS and the Youth of Detroit

The Second Joint Center/CDC Forum on AIDS and Young People Exposes Myths and Calls for Church Involvement

Tragic Roots of the Black Middle Class

A New Book by Kevin K. Gaines, Uplifting the Race, *Chronicles Some of the Tragic Origins of Class Division Among Blacks*

POLITICAL TRENDLETTER

PERSPECTIVE

ISSN 0740-0195

PRICE $1.50

Ron Brown—Bridge Builder

"He was a man, take him for all and all, I shall not see his like again." I recall this line from *Hamlet* when I reflect on the life of my friend Ron Brown. He was a ground-breaker and pioneer—the first black partner of one of Washington's most influential law firms, Patton Boggs and Blow, the first black chair of the Democratic National Committee, the first black Secretary of Commerce.

He was a world-class deal maker. Indeed, his life was lost in the midst of a trade mission to the former Yugoslavia. As Secretary of Commerce he had led other such missions to Russia, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America with top executives of American corporations in tow, including minority entrepreneurs. He helped American business secure deals worth an estimated $40 billion. By all measures, he was a success.

It was perhaps as the first black chairman of the Democratic National Committee that Ron began to leave his indelible mark as a bridge builder and conciliator. He sought to take the reigns of the party in 1989 after the third straight Democratic presidential election loss. The press and many party regulars dismissed his candidacy because he had been a close advisor to Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign the year before. Some were skeptical that a black man could pull a splintered party together and raise money from a support base of largely white contributors.

Ron proved all the skeptics wrong. He was elected chairman, got disparate elements of the party to work in harmony, and raised more money than any of his predecessors. He turned the 1992 Democratic presidential nominating convention in New York into a launch pad for Bill Clinton's successful campaign. The President has often said that he couldn't have been elected without Ron's help.

To build a bridge, one must span two points separated by some distance. Building bridges between people of different races, different political philosophies, different economic circumstance, or different nationalities were feats Ron accomplished with grace and style. I suppose he was able to do this because he learned to negotiate diverse worlds at an early age. He grew up in Harlem where his father managed the Theresa Hotel, across the street from the Apollo Theater. There he learned to be relaxed around America's greatest black musicians, writers, actors, athletes, and political figures. While attending mostly-white prep schools and Middlebury College in Vermont, Ron learned to operate and excel in environments where there were few blacks. While in the Army, he was the only black officer at the base on which he served in Germany. He was at ease in a boardroom full of corporate CEOs, in a depressed neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles, dining with finance ministers from foreign countries, or fighting for civil rights as head of the National Urban League's Washington office.

Ron could have occupied his lofty perch of power and tried to diminish his origins and his heritage as an African American in a dance of denial. Some successful blacks have, thinking that once one arrives at a certain station, issues of color become encumbrances. Ron would have none of it. He was always black. He was comfortable with who he was and secure in his abilities. That security allowed him to move from one world to another and bring together peoples of different backgrounds and interests. We will miss him, and so will the nation. ■



PRESIDENT

FOCUS Copyright © 1996 Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Inc. The monthly magazine of the **Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies,** 1090 Vermont Ave., N.W., Ste. 1100, Washington, D.C. 20005-4961 (202) 789-3500. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is a national, nonprofit, tax-exempt institution that conducts research on public policy issues of special concern to black Americans and promotes informed and effective involvement of blacks in the governmental process. Founded in 1970, the Joint Center provides independent and nonpartisan analyses through research, publication, and outreach programs. Opinions expressed in signed *FOCUS* articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *FOCUS* is published monthly. $15.00 per year by JCPES, Inc.

PRESIDENT/Eddie N. Williams
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT/Fredric Leigh
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT/Eleanor Farrar
VICE PRESIDENT, RESEARCH/Milton Morris
VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT/Kathleen Vander Horst
VICE PRESIDENT, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION/Brenda Watkins Noel

EDITOR, *FOCUS*/David C. Ruffin
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR/Diane Powers
ASSOCIATE EDITOR/Marc DeFrancis
PRODUCTION MANAGER/Theresa Kilcourse
TRENDLETTER RESEARCHER/Alfred Baltimore

BOARD OF GOVERNORS
Pauline A. Schneider/Hunton & Williams, *Chair*
LeBaron Taylor/Sony Music Entertainment, Inc., *Vice Chair*
Hector M. Hyacinthe/Packard Frank Business and Corporate Interiors, Inc., *Treasurer*
Eddie N. Williams/Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, *President*
Bishop John Hurst Adams/Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Church
Norma Kelley Asnes/Kelley Asnes Productions
Martina L. Bradford/AT&T
Andrew F. Brimmer/Brimmer & Company, Inc.
Charles U. Daly/John F. Kennedy Library Foundation
Julian C. Dixon/U.S. House of Representatives
Wendell G. Freeland/Freeland & Kronz
Elliott S. Hall/Ford Motor Company
Bonnie Guiton Hill/McIntire School of Commerce, University of Virginia
Freeman A. Hrabowski/President, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Jayne Brumley Ikard, Consultant
Jeremy M. Jacobs/Delaware North Companies
Patrice L. Mitchell, Office of Comptroller, City of New York
Bernard Rapoport/American Income Life Insurance Company
Audrey Rowe/National Urban League

Members Emeriti: William B. Boyd, Kenneth B. Clark, Louis E. Martin, James D. Wolfensohn

Eleanor Farrar/*Secretary to the Board*

Ron Brown's Message of Change and Hope

Before His Death, One of the Nation's Premiere Conciliators Urged Black Leaders to Remain at the Center of America's Moral Struggles

On January 25, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown presented the initial address at the National Policy Institute cosponsored by the Joint Center and the seven national organizations of black public officials. None of the 400 assembled black elected officials, civil rights leaders, clergy, community activists, and policy experts imagined that just two months later he would be lost to us, the victim of a tragic plane crash in the Balkans. In one of his last speeches, Ron Brown exhorted black leaders to adapt to the dramatic changes taking place in the world, resist efforts to reverse the gains of the 1960s and '70s, and make common cause with those who share our interests. His speech follows.

I am very appreciative and very pleased to be here in your warm embrace. And with all I go through every day, I need a warm embrace! It's wonderful to be here with my dear and good friend, Eddie Williams, who has contributed so much—not only to our community, but to all of America.

I'm going to try to remember the admonition of my father, who always told me, "Ron, your speeches do not have to be eternal to be immortal." So I want to tell you the truth. I came tonight with a brilliantly prepared text, and I have decided not to use it because I am among friends. I am among brothers and sisters who understand what the struggle is all about.

Now, I'm the former chairman of the Democratic Party of the United States. And Eddie told me to be nonpartisan, but he didn't tell me that I couldn't tell the truth, and I'm going to tell the truth tonight. To be here with a group of leaders—leaders of organizations, people who are connected to our communities—and to have a chance to dialogue with you and feel your energy and strength is a very special privilege.

We live in extraordinarily challenging times. Times of hope, times of opportunity, times of change, and times of trepidation. We have many challenges within our own community, and it is certainly appropriate for us to focus on those challenges. But it seems to me if we're really interested in making a difference, if we're really interested in promoting change, we need to put our concerns into some broader perspective. We need to understand what is going on in the world around us, and how that relates to us, and how that causes us to reevaluate the way we think and the way we approach things.

Because the changes in the world have been so profound that it's not good enough any longer just to do all the same old things we've always been doing, a little bit better. We've got to do a whole range of new and different things and act in dynamic and creative ways, because this is not the same world it was. It's never going to be that way again. Change is happening too fast and sometimes change is happening so quickly that we fail to step back and consider what is going on around us—not just in our own communities, our own states, our own nation. Change is going on all over this globe. We are now more interrelated and interdependent than we have ever been before.

Adapting to a Changed World

Who in this room, for example, would have considered eight years ago that there would be no more Soviet Union? It doesn't exist anymore. No more bipolar world. That fact in and of itself must change the way we view ourselves and our role, not only in this country but in the world. Who would have believed or predicted the enormous changes taking place in eastern and central European countries that have been moving from dictatorship and totalitarianism to democracy and from state-controlled economies to market-driven economies? Think of the unbelievable transformation and disruption that have taken place in those lands. And who would have predicted what's happening in China, a country of 1.3 billion people and the fastest-growing economy in the world? We have to be in China if we are going to protect our commercial interests and create economic growth and jobs here at home. And what's happening in the rest of Asia? By the year 2010, India is going to be bigger than China, and there's also dramatic change in Southeast Asia.

Consider Latin America, our neighbors to the south. We had a Summit of the Americas in Miami, Florida, in December 1994, the first one in almost three decades. In the 1960s, almost all the leaders who attended came in military uniforms bedecked with medals. This time, the participants came in civilian dress, popularly elected by the people of their nations.

Look at South Africa, where Nelson Mandela languished in prison for 27 years. Just five years after his release he is leading a country from the ugliness of apartheid to the beauty of nonracial democracy. You'd heard all the predictions. 'Oh, if Mandela takes over, there's going to be communism. He's a communist.' But he's presiding over a market-driven economy, because he has concluded that's best for the people of South Africa. That's how you take the wealth that was only benefiting 20 percent of the people and try to build an economy and a society that serves the interests and aspirations of all of the people. These are all dramatic, incredible changes that have got to influence the way we think about our role in America and our role in the world.

Continued on page 4

Ron Brown

Continued from page 3

The Advantage of Diversity

Why is that particularly important to me as secretary of Commerce? It's because I focus on economic growth, job creation, and what it takes to grow this economy and create opportunity for our people. Much of my energy is focused on helping America to compete in this new global economy. If you evaluate America's economic performance over the last decade of recession and stagnation—and now recovery—you will discover that one of the things that has driven economic growth has been exports. We've got to export our goods and products and services in this global marketplace.

And for the first time, we in America are realizing that we have a tremendous advantage in this new world, because we have the most diverse society in the world. The United States of America is made up of people from all kinds of places. Different ethnic groups, different racial groups, struggling to work together. And look at where the new markets are in the world. They're in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. And look at the makeup of our people. That, by definition, if we are smart—if we learn how to work together—gives us an extraordinary advantage. I'm not saying that only Americans of Hispanic backgrounds ought to be seeking economic opportunity in Latin America, or African Americans can only seek economic opportunity in Africa. But it ought to be an important part of the American theme. And maybe, just maybe, for the first time in all of American history, America's women and minorities will be looked at as assets instead of liabilities.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing for our country? And wouldn't that change attitudes? It would mean that we have to believe in ourselves, and believe in our own importance. I was always taught growing up in Harlem that if you didn't believe in yourself, you couldn't convince anybody else to believe in you. So we have reason to believe in ourselves. And when you look at the role that we have played in America, we have been the leaders and creators of change in America.

A Critical Time

Let's look at where we are now. We had some hard years during the 1980s. The gains of the '60s and '70s were being rolled back, and there was an erosion of progress. But we were steadfast, turned the tide in 1992 and, got things back on track. Then came 1994. I believe this is the most critical period in my lifetime, because there are some people in power who do not wish us well. This is very serious and very dangerous. I deal with it every day. This is not just a regular old debate, because you've got some folks who have the attitude: 'Don't bother me with facts, I've already made up my mind.' That's a dangerous person to deal with—there is no reason, no connection. It's like you're on different planets. So let us not fool ourselves that this is just like any old time in the political cycle and this too will end. We've got to make it end. It's not going to end by itself. And there's so very much at stake.

We're about to lose a whole generation of young people in America, unless we intervene in some common-sense ways to reach them, to bring them hope and let them know they count. We know what happens when young people feel totally disconnected and feel they have no stake in their communities. They engage in antisocial behavior because they don't think they have anything to lose and don't belong. We've got to change that mentality. So it is up to us as leaders to create an environment of hope. This is about real people and real communities. It's about a country that is on the verge of being ripped apart at its very fabric. But we've got to protect it because we have a stake in it.

So how are we going to create the future? In the United States of America, in a democracy, I only know of one way to do it, and that's through the political process. Do you always get everything you want? No. It's about participation, coalition-building and intelligent compromise. It's about grouping yourselves with like-minded people and staying focused on our goals. You have to keep your eye on the price. So our responsibility is to get out there and tell the truth. Communicate with our people, but also go beyond our communities.

Responsibility and Unity

You know, some of our adversaries in America have a very interesting way of operating. Whenever you step out beyond your community, they label you as something different, so that you feel no responsibility for your community and it feels no real interest in you, or even in protecting you. That's a pretty scary thing and we've got to change that mentality. Those of us who have had opportunities and achievements need to always remember that we can never disconnect ourselves from our community. And those of you on whose shoulders we have stood should not leave us out there by ourselves.

We must have unity. But unity doesn't mean we've got to be together every minute of every day. Unity doesn't mean that you can't walk down different paths and take on different responsibilities. Unity doesn't mean that you have to be restricted to just leading in your own community. You can provide leadership in the country and the world. But unity means looking out for each other. It means understanding our commonality. It means understanding your responsibility to your community.

It's not complicated at all. This is about the kind of country we are, what we stand for, what we believe in, and about who we stand with. And we have to break it down so everyday people that we lead understand it, so that we can energize them and they can energize us. And then, we'll be able to walk down the same path with a common sense of vision and purpose and a common direction. We must be steadfast and focused, we must plan together and struggle together and reach out to each other

Continued on last page

April 1996

POLITICAL TRENDLETTER

Inside This Issue:

- Law enforcement agencies are investigating the firebombings of 26 black churches in southern states.
- Mississippi congressional candidate, Kevin Antoine, a Jackson urban planner, won a primary runoff and the right to face incumbent Democrat-turned-Republican Rep. Mike Parker in November.
- General Motors is contributing $1.5 million toward the construction of a memorial to blacks who fought in the Revolutionary War.
- At the Joint Center's annual dinner, Vice President Al Gore spoke of the governments efforts to ensure that blacks are not kept off of the information superhighway.
- Books by political strategist James Carville and comedian Al Franken slap conservatives with humor.

Southern Black Churches Torched

Black religious communities in several southern states have been beset by a rash of firebombings that are chillingly reminiscent of assaults by racist terrorist groups in the 1960s. Federal officials are investigating at least 41 church fires that have taken place since January 1990. The targets have generally been churches located in small rural towns in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The interracial, nondenominational Inner City Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, where professional football player **REGGIE WHITE** of the Green Bay Packers is an associate pastor, was also burned. The attack on the Inner City Church is somewhat untypical among the fires reported in this investigation since it has a larger congregation and is located in a bigger city. Officials investigating this incident estimate that 18 Molotov cocktails and about 75 gallons of gasoline and kerosene were used to destroy the two-story brick building. On the back door of the church, graffiti reading "Die, nigger, die" and "Nigger lovers" were found spraypainted.

Fortunately, to date no one has been injured. Yet the frequency of the attacks, which have usually been made under cover of darkness, has accelerated recently to an average of one a month. In some instances, nearby churches were torched on the same day. Macedonia and Johnson Grove Baptist churches, located 90 minutes from each other in adjacent counties in western Tennessee, were both burned on January 13, 1995. "Paired" firebombings also took place in Spring, Texas, on January 27, 1996. Four churches were bombed in the area of Zachary, Louisiana, on February 1, 1996. In the small town of Boligee in Greene County, Alabama, four churches were destroyed between December 22, 1995, and January 11, 1996, including the 100-year-old Mount Zion Baptist Church. Greene County has a majority black population and is one of the poorest counties in America.

Prompted by the NAACP, the U.S. Justice Department is conducting a civil rights investigation of the bombings. Officials from state and local law enforcement agencies, as well as the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, are also looking into the attacks. Some of these law enforcement efforts have born fruit. In March, three men were sentenced to prison terms in Tennessee after pleading guilty to torching two black churches. **ROBERT LEE JOHNSON**, **MARC JETT**, and the latter's cousin, **MICHAEL JETT**, were sentenced to terms from three years and ten months to four years and nine months. In all, 24 white males, some of them juveniles, have been arrested for torching churches. While federal law enforcement agencies have moved forward on investigating these crimes, no congressional hearings on them have been placed on the calendar.

Those who have had their churches destroyed are holding religious services in private homes, recreational facilities, and other churches. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference has formed a special fund to help burned-out congregations. The address of the fund is: SCLC National Headquarters, "Burned Churches," 334 Auburn Avenue, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30312.

Mississippi Surprise!

On April 2, black former Air Force captain KEVIN ANTOINE upset the Mississippi political establishment by winning the Democratic congressional primary runoff in the state's 4th congressional district. He will face Congressman MIKE PARKER in the November general election. Antoine, who had never run for elected office before, defeated 11-year Jackson city councilwoman MARGARET BARRETT, who is white, by a comfortable 56 to 44 percent margin. A runoff was held because neither Antoine, Barrett, nor a third candidate, high school teacher DENNIS WAYNE FORTENBERRY, got more than 50 percent of the vote in the March 12 primary (Antoine received 37 percent, Barrett 43 percent, and Fortenberry 20 percent).

Ignored and unendorsed by most of the state's black politicians, Antoine, a 36-year-old urban planner, carried out a grassroots campaign financed primarily from his own pocket. He talked with voters directly in small meetings at churches, civic organizations, and colleges. Students from Jackson State University, Tougaloo College, and Hinds Community College passed out campaign literature and canvassed neighborhoods to drum up support. One of his campaign slogans has been, "They can out-spend us, but they can't out-think us."

Antoine is articulate and well educated. He holds a masters degree in urban affairs from Norfolk State University in Virginia and a law degree from the College of William and Mary. He also studied accounting and international relations. In addition to serving six years in the Air Force, Antoine has been a high school teacher, bank official, and director of planning in the Hinds County Department of Public Works.

In a tough primary contest, Antoine opposed GOP proposals to cut funding for Medicaid and Medicare. He supports women's right to reproductive choice and opposes school vouchers that would divert public funds to private and parochial schools. Closer to home, he plans to work for the establishment of a subway and regional bus system for the Jackson metropolitan area. One of the benefits of such a system would be to enable low-income blacks to commute to retail jobs in the suburbs. He has also vowed to help predominantly black Jackson State University receive more equitable funding and has urged Mississippi to place professional schools there.

Antoine attracted the support of women, the elderly, and college students, and he estimates that he also garnered 30 percent of the white vote. While African Americans make up a sizeable proportion (37 percent) of the district's voting-age residents, some white support will be essential if Antoine is to prevail in the fall. With the Democratic nomination secured, he must now focus on beating Mike Parker, the incumbent. Originally elected as a Democrat, Parker, 46, switched to the Republican Party on November 10, 1995. Antoine hopes to receive financial support from the state and national Democratic parties and from organizations politically aligned with them, including organized labor, especially the teachers union.

Parker, now serving his fourth term in Congress, has a long history of voting on the House floor against the interests of his black constituents. He voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1990, and last year, while still a Democrat, was a staunch supporter of the Republican "Contract With America," voting to cut funding for social programs that help the poor while cutting taxes on the wealthy and spending billions more for prison construction. He has also opposed the Brady Law, which requires a waiting period before the purchase of a handgun.

Despite Antoine's success so far, his campaign is regarded by some pundits as a quixotic quest by a political novice. But it would not be wise to count him out. Kevin Antoine has learned how to win and his campaign has momentum. For more information about the campaign, write the Kevin Antoine Campaign for Congress Committee, P.O. Box 731, Jackson, Mississippi 39205.

Honoring America's First Black Patriots

Few Americans know that about 5,000 black men fought to establish this nation in the Revolutionary War. Now The Patriots Foundation, a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation, is attempting to rectify this lack of awareness by sponsoring the construction of the Black Patriots Revolutionary War Memorial. Congress has passed legislation approving the memorial and the site for its construction on the National Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, but the Foundation must raise $6.5 million in private funds and begin construction by this October or the land will be forfeited.

The approach of that deadline brought corporate leaders and a bipartisan group of U.S. representatives and others to Capitol Hill on February 29 to rally support for the project. Speaking at the event, Rep. J.C. WATTS (R-Okla.) said, "The Declaration of Independence, whose author penned the words 'All men are created equal,' was signed with the blood of black and white men. Some of the black men who fought for that independence were slaves who had hopes of freedom."

The 90-foot-long curved bronze memorial will depict the contributions of black slaves and free men and women from the early 1600s to 1783. Its designer is sculptor ED DWIGHT, many of whose 6,000 works are on display in galleries throughout the United States. In a former career, Dwight was a U.S. Air Force test pilot and the nation's first black astronaut trainee.

At the Capitol Hill event, General Motors Corporation presented a check for $400,000 to go toward the memorial and committed to raising an additional $1.1 million. Nor was the giant car-maker the only contributor that day. Black eighth-grader MELANIE BUTLER, student body president of the Holy Redeemer School in Washington, D.C., presented a check for $500 raised by her fellow students. For more information, contact The Patriots Foundation, 1612 K Street, NW, Suite 1104, Washington, D.C. 20006 (1-800-888-9811).

Gore: Attacking Information Apartheid

As keynote speaker at the Joint Center's Annual Dinner on March 19, Vice President Al Gore decried the "digital divide" which separates many African Americans from access to the information superhighway. Excerpts from the speech:

"In the past four years, e-mail, Internet surfing, and home pages have exploded into our national life. Every day brings another story of a start-up company earning millions of dollars or another T-shirt-to-riches tale of a young techno-whiz. But as access to the information superhighway grows, we risk leaving behind vast portions of our population. While new communications and computing technologies are revolutionizing how—and how much—our children learn, they don't reach children who grow up in schools and homes without computers.

"Make no mistake: there *is* a digital divide in this country. For example, about seven million homes in America don't have basic telephone service and, therefore, can't possibly link up with the information superhighway. Talking about an information superhighway to Americans who barely have an information dirt road is a cruel joke....

"The pattern holds in our nation's classrooms. According to a study released three weeks ago by the Education Department, half of the schools in America are connected to the Internet. But minority students and low-income students are significantly less likely to attend schools with access ramps to the information superhighway. Among schools with large numbers of low-income students, just 31 percent have Internet access—half the rate of schools with wealthier children.

"But we're beginning to close the digital divide. We're letting the world know that this country will not tolerate information apartheid—two technological communities, separate and unequal. I'm very proud to say that President Clinton has committed to connecting *every* school in *every* Empowerment Zone in the United States to the information superhighway by the end of this year. This is an extraordinary initiative, and it means that students and teachers in these neighborhoods will be able to connect to each other... and eventually to the rest of the planet.

"Just a few weeks ago, I helped some young people from the Baltimore Empowerment Zone connect to NASA Mission Control in Houston. Some of these boys and girls had never spent much time outside their neighborhood in Baltimore. But thanks to the Internet, they were able to see and speak directly to an astronaut.

"The historic telecommunications legislation President Clinton signed last month requires companies that benefit from deregulation to provide affordable access to schools and libraries at a discounted rate. Soon President Clinton will sign an Executive Order that helps direct the federal government's surplus computers and computer equipment to the nation's Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities. With this simple action and the Education Technology Challenge Fund we've also launched, millions of dollars of software and hardware may reach the neighborhoods that need them most....

"The steepest barrier to progress facing families in urban America may be the unspeakable sense of isolation. These Americans are isolated from the economy and jobs. In communities where high rates of joblessness prevail, informal networks of information, advice, and opportunity cannot emerge—and so the cycle of joblessness swirls ever downward.

"For these isolated Americans, our most urgent task is to reconnect them to America's promise... We should make sure that every child in this country—no matter where she lives or how much money her family has—can tap into the Internet's web of information. We should make sure that every school in this country—no matter where it is located or how many of its students need subsidized lunches—bubbles with learning and clatters with the sound of children tapping keyboards."

And Now For Some Political Humor

Numerous tomes by far-right conservatives have appeared in bookstores of late, cataloging the evils of government and depicting liberals as godless miscreants who are eroding basic American values. Well, two liberals have decided to strike back with books of their own. *We're Right, They're Wrong* (Random House) by Democratic political strategist **JAMES CARVILLE**, and *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations* (Delacorte Press) by comedian **AL FRANKEN** poke fun at ultraconservatives and debunk many of their ideas. Carville starts his book with an unapologetic endorsement of government and its role in this society. He begins thus: "The first person ever to slap me on the ass was a federal employee. He was the army doctor at Fort Benning, Georgia, who brought me into this world. My daddy was serving there at Fort Benning as an infantry officer, so he and my momma were able to start me off with some fine federal health care."

While defending government programs, Carville takes aim at right-wing positions on the economy, taxes, and welfare reform. These gibes usually take the form of rebuttals to pronouncements made by prominent conservatives, like this well-publicized remark made on May 5, 1995, by Sen. **PHIL GRAMM** (R–Tex.):

"Let's reform welfare and demand the able-bodied men and women riding in the wagon on welfare get out of the wagon and help the rest of us pull."

Carville's response: "What a joke! The Republicans don't want these people to help pull the wagon. All they care about is tossing them and their kids off it."

Carville pursues this particular senatorial quarry with relish, characterising Gramm as a "ward of the state": "Phil Gramm is the quintessential hypocrite when it comes to government support. From the moment he was born, in a military hospital, he's been a first-class passenger on the wagon of government. The government paid for him to attend the Georgia Military Academy. It paid for him to get a degree at the University of Georgia. It paid for his graduate work. It paid him to be a consultant to the U.S. Bureau of Mines and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It paid his honoraria when he gave commencement speeches at public universities. It paid his salary when he was teaching economics. It has paid his salary in Congress for seventeen years. As far as I can figure, the man has never held a private-sector job."

And finally: "About a year ago, the staff at the NBC News show *Meet the Press* put together a list of all the ways Gramm had fed at the public trough. They estimated that in today's dollars, Phil Gramm has gotten $3.5 million in direct assistance from the taxpayers. If you throw in his government pension, it would top $4.6 million."

Al Franken's book has similar gems. Here's one about affirmative action, a favorite target of Republican leaders: "I'd like to speak to an affirmative action program which, as a Harvard graduate, I do like. And that is affirmative action for the children of Ivy League grads.... Is the kid a legacy? That is, the child of an alumnus? If so, the kid is in. There are all kinds of good reasons for this. Well, one really. Fund-raising. But as it stands, it's an affirmative action program for one of the most privileged groups in the country: the sons and daughters of people like me.

"Now we're told that one of the 'poisonous and pernicious' 'unintended consequences' of affirmative action is that it taints the real accomplishments of qualified blacks who have earned their place at the table. I'm sure that's true. But I think that's just further evidence of the racism in our culture. All the time I was at Harvard, I never heard a Lowell or a Cabot remark, 'I dare say, I despise this godawful legacy policy. It makes me so suspect in the eyes of my classmates.'"

AIDS and the Youth of Detroit

The Second Joint Center/CDC Forum on AIDS and Young People Exposes Myths and Calls for Church Involvement

by Wilhelmina A. Leigh

When AIDS and its causal agent, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) were first identified in the early 1980s, they were perceived as a rarity, found primarily among gay white males ages 35 to 45 living in the major cities on the East and West coasts. Fifteen years later, HIV/AIDS has leapt across the demographic divide. In late 1995, more than half a million cases of AIDS were reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), affecting men and women of all ages and races throughout the nation.

AIDS has been spreading with a special ferocity among African Americans in recent years. According to Dr. Peter Gulick, assistant professor in the College of Medicine at Michigan State University, one out of three black men between the ages of 29 and 35 now is thought to be HIV positive. And AIDS is one of the leading causes of death for black women ages 25 to 44. Because the HIV virus can lie dormant for 10 years or more, these and related statistics mean that HIV infection is being contracted by blacks during their teen years.

With this in mind, the CDC funded a series of forums hosted by the Joint Center to address the issue of AIDS especially as it affects African American adolescents. The events bring together local public officials and others in the community to share information about promising initiatives for changing the risky behaviors that make adolescents vulnerable. The first forum, conducted June 29, 1995 in Oakland, California, was featured in the September issue of *FOCUS*. The second, titled, "Health Issues for African American Youth: The Role for Leadership," was held in Detroit, February 12, 1996. A third forum was held in Memphis on March 9.

Organized in collaboration with the Detroit Health Department, this second forum attracted more than 70 leaders—local and state appointed and elected officials, service providers, and community activists. They discussed the ongoing initiatives in Detroit and surrounding communities that address the multiple threats to the health of African American youth of substance abuse, violence, unprotected sexual intercourse, and HIV/AIDS. Two recurring themes during the discussion were the role of prevention education and the role for local leaders in fostering such education.

Risk Born of Hopelessness

The question naturally arises as to why African American youth should be contracting the HIV infection today at rates so much greater than other young people. Dr. Bailus Walker, director of Health Programs at the Joint Center, pointed out that the lack of a vision of a brighter future combined with the youthful urge to experiment can have destructive consequences. This was echoed by several other speakers, including Rev. Renee McCoy, who argued that youth who have nothing to live for simply don't fear dying. Rev. McCoy, a pastor of the Full Truth Unity Fellowship Church in Detroit and a former HIV/AIDS community liaison for the Detroit Health Department, referred to the "brokenness and harshness" of these youths' lives.

That young people are the originators of their own destructive behavior was an assumption questioned by Allen Martin of the Detroit Health Department's Bureau of Substance Abuse. Arguing that HIV/AIDS, violence, and substance abuse result from the high-risk behaviors of adults that have been adopted by youth, Martin suggested that we might get better results if we work on changing the behavior of adults. He acknowledged, however, that one way to do this may be to teach the preferred behavior to youth who can take it home for their parents to emulate.

The need for strong AIDS education was brought out by professionals in the field who have found a surprising level of misinformation among young black men and women. Many youth still believe that HIV infection occurs only among persons who are gay and, therefore, assume that because they are heterosexual, they can abuse intravenous drugs and have unprotected sexual intercourse without risk of infection. Dr. Gulick views correcting this misconception as a major reason to continue AIDS education among youth.

Rev. McCoy noted as well that the cultural outlook of African American youth often differs markedly from that of the adult experts who prepare prevention messages. For example, African Americans generally may not appreciate the distinction between condom use for contraception and for protection from disease. Those who believe, as do some nationalists, that pregnancy prevention programs targeting blacks have genocide as their goal, may dismiss efforts to encourage condom use.

Another myth explains the AIDS epidemic itself as a form of germ warfare being waged against racial/ethnic minorities by the dominant society. Researchers still do not know exactly how the HIV virus originated or first entered humans—just as they still do not know the origins of so many major diseases. Yet James Knox, a person with AIDS who works for the Wayne County Neighborhood Legal

Continued on page 6

Dr. Leigh is a senior research associate at the Joint Center.

AIDS in Detroit

Continued from page 5

Services AIDS Law Center, noted that this was the question he encountered most often when speaking to students.

Several speakers were skeptical that scientific explanations could ever quell teens' fears of a conspiracy. Yet, without some basic trust in medical and governmental authorities, young people may remain unresponsive to sound prevention advice. Constance Rowley, of the Southeastern Michigan HIV/AIDS Council, admitted that she deals with the "origin" question by ignoring it in order to focus attention on useful preventive information.

Some voices at the forum were optimistic about the value of education in helping to save lives. Dr. Margaret L. Betts, vice president of the Detroit Board of Education, credited education and consequent changes in behavior with the decline in new cases of HIV among gay white males and suggested that it could be equally effective among African Americans.

While the open discussion of AIDS prevention in school classrooms remains controversial in many communities, a recent Gallup survey shows broad support for including the subject in the curriculum. Dr. Betts cited a survey that found that 79 percent of adolescents consider comprehensive school health instruction as important as other subjects taught in the schools. Perhaps more important for school boards and school politics, the survey found that 92 percent of parents consider HIV/AIDS prevention education to be as important as, or more important than, other school subjects.

Partnerships for Youth AIDS Awareness

Guided by the Michigan model of a hands-on, materials-oriented program to deliver comprehensive school health instruction and services to children throughout the state, the Detroit school system has developed a health program with eight components, including health education and health services. The system requires that 10th graders take a course for personal health management that covers disease prevention and control, substance use and abuse, human sexuality, violence prevention, fitness, stress management, emotional and mental health, and nutrition.

Given current attacks on similar education programs, the Detroit comprehensive health program is at risk of cancellation. But David L. Snead, general superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools, stated that the system will continue to rely on partnerships with local hospitals and clinics to help these initiatives stay alive. Other partnerships have been essential as well. In one of the city's vocational high schools, the Red Cross trains youth to be peer educators about HIV/AIDS; these youths then share their prevention message with students at other schools. Other valued partners include the Kellogg Foundation, which funds health centers in 13 city schools and several of the city's medical facilities.

Forum participants spoke of ways in which they felt that school curriculums need to be supplemented or reoriented. Dr. Gulick stated that while youth must be told that condom use can be effective in blocking the virus, they must also know that the only behavior guaranteed to avoid HIV transmission is sexual abstinence.

Jerome Boyce, a person with AIDS, suggested that as it is currently structured the health curriculum in the Detroit school system does not yet allow the breadth of discussion needed to prevent HIV/AIDS among youth. In his view, a dialogue needs to be encouraged on the subject of human sexuality in all its varied expressions. Boyce believes young people want this type of discussion and, indeed, need it to be able to deal with sensitive issues such as persuading partners to wear condoms.

Expanding the Partnership

But the business of AIDS prevention cannot be left for the schools to bear alone. Dr. Bailus Walker pointed out that since the health needs of youth are systemic, reaching beyond substance abuse and HIV infection, initiatives to meet these needs can only be successful if they expand partnerships to include not only schools, but also churches and social service agencies. Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer, who opened the forum, cited the challenge to leadership to develop creative community responses to the overlapping problems of substance abuse and HIV infection.

Rev. Renee McCoy emphasized the role churches can play. To reach youth and change the high-risk behaviors responsible for health problems such as AIDS, churches must "come out of the scriptures and live the gospel," she said. More specifically, she identified three areas where churches can contribute to the effort. First, Rev. McCoy believes churches need to help make their communities safe for children. Many youths today find the peer pressure against positive behavior more than they are willing or able to bear. Making communities safe, she argued, means churches must battle the drug dealers who have won the allegiance of youths, even if those drug dealers "are our blood relatives."

Second, communities of faith should provide places where youth can talk to one another and to adults, filling the role that dope houses currently fill for too many youth. In Rev. McCoy's view, establishing dialogue to let youths know that adults feel good about them and to help youths feel good about themselves is the first step toward changing high-risk behavior. Third, churches should teach parents about childrearing. She argued that churches can be instrumental in giving both parents and their children a vision that is larger than their immediate environment, making it possible for youths to look forward to long, productive lives, favoring life over death.

While churches have an essential role to play in educating young people about HIV/AIDS, the Detroit conference demonstrates that success in preventing the spread of this scourge among youth will require multiple strategies involving a variety of community-based institutions. Those taking part in these efforts must be prepared to make a long-term commitment to addressing this fatal and yet incurable disease that has taken hold in America's black communities. ■

Tragic Roots of the Black Middle Class

A New Book by Kevin K. Gaines, Uplifting the Race, *Chronicles Some of the Tragic Origins of Class Division Among Blacks*

by Marland E. Buckner Jr.

Amid often negative assessments about the present state of black America, there is ample cause to celebrate the success of the black middle class. Although this group's achievements are recognized in current media and political circles, that was not always the case. Kevin K. Gaines's comprehensively researched *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996) finds an upwardly mobile strata of black America struggling to be recognized as "respectable" in an unrelentingly racist late nineteenth century America. Gaines is an assistant professor of history and African American studies at Princeton University.

These middle and upper-class blacks battled prejudice through "racial uplift," an ideology designed to promote the assimilation of African Americans into white American society under the leadership of blacks who personified respectability, social superiority, and "race progress." Though it was meant to function on behalf of African Americans, uplift thinking relied on nineteenth century racist and sexist sensibilities—assumptions that saw superiority in light complexion and that argued that women should remain in the home as virtuous, but essentially helpless, wives and mothers. Tragically, Gaines argues, by adhering to those views, uplift thinkers ultimately had a hand in their own oppression.

The Reconstruction era's tantalizing promise of full citizenship for blacks quickly degenerated into *de jure* disfranchisement. By the late nineteenth century, many blacks lived under the constant threat of Ku Klux Klan terrorism and lynchings without protection from government at any level. The U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned southern segregation with its 1896 *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* decision, which made the "separate but equal" doctrine the law of the land.

Nonetheless, according to Gaines, middle and upper-class blacks used uplift ideology both to distinguish themselves from impoverished lower-class blacks and to gain acceptance into mainstream American life. To do so, they had to combat a popular culture that portrayed blacks as happy-go-lucky, fried-chicken-and-biscuit-eating primitives and an omnipresent danger to American civilization. Black men were believed to be restrained from raping white women only by the threat of a lynching; black women were cast as mammies or sexual degenerates.

Uplifters battled these perceptions by promoting images of their own respectability. Gaines briefly highlights various photographic exhibits, anti-racist cartoons, and iconography used by uplifters to promote family stability, thrift, and sexual restraint—required virtues for middle-class acceptance. But in their struggles, uplifters embraced the "survival of the fittest" doctrine of social Darwinism, built upon assumptions of biological inferiority, to fashion distinctions between themselves and lower-class blacks.

Social problems, particularly among impoverished southern blacks who moved north, became social "pathologies" in the minds of uplift thinkers, who responded by working to "civilize" their allegedly unassimilable brethren. Gaines cites W.E.B. DuBois' 1899 sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, as a prominent example of the "pathologizing" of black life. Black social reform organizations spread the Victorian gospel of middle-class morality, particularly the importance of stable male-headed households. Sadly, Gaines emphasizes, uplifters failed to accompany these efforts with legal and political agitation against the institutional discrimination responsible for the social dislocation they sought to cure. Through their struggle for lower-class behavior modification, uplifters assumed a blame-the-victim mentality that Gaines characterizes as "self-lacerating" because it internalized "prevailing racist and misogynistic attitudes."

Gaines documents this tragic irony through a series of engaging biographical portraits in which he convincingly demonstrates the complex, self-destructive character of uplift thought. One such thinker was black nationalist William Ferris, a Harvard-educated writer who coined the term "Negrosaxon." Ferris' ideology was a bizarre amalgam of Anglo-American imperialism, patriarchy, and class distinction. He claimed that only when the black man reached the level of civilization and manhood achieved by Anglo-Saxons would the Negro race deserve its own nation-state.

Uplift thinkers were hardly homogeneous. Anna Julia Cooper, teacher and author of *A Voice from the South*, and poet Alice Dunbar-Nelson vigorously challenged uplift's patriarchal orthodoxy. Writers Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Corrothers were ambivalent about uplift's class distinctions, particularly those championed by DuBois. After World War I, race riots, the migration of southern blacks to the urban north, and imperialist intrusions in Africa served to forge a new generation of uplift thinkers. Political organizer Hubert H. Harrison, for example, promoted a militant version of uplift accompanied by then radical demands for broad-based civil rights. But these

Continued on back page

Mr. Buckner is the George R. Healy fellow in American Studies at the College of William and Mary and is a visiting scholar at the Joint Center.

Tragic Roots

Continued from page 7

challenges within uplift thought could not transcend social pathology as the means by which much of black life was understood and explained.

By the 1960s, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report—*The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which brought discussion of the black family and "urban pathologies" to national prominence. Moynihan's work "represented the mainstreaming of the sociological component of racial uplift ideology," claims Gaines. It perpetuated "the equation of patriarchal authority with race progress" and continues to be used, he argues, as justification for scapegoating and excluding large segments of the population from the rights, protections, and entitlements of citizenship.

Amid debates over welfare reform, black male incarceration, black middle-class flight to the suburbs, and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*—Gaines's timely, perceptive volume urges us to examine the history and ideology behind many current conceptions of the black middle class. What we find, he suggests, may prove disturbing. ■

Ron Brown

Continued from page 4

and embrace each other and love each other every once in a while.

I think we have a special responsibility. And that responsibility is to lead. We've always been in the forefront of the moral struggles that have taken place in America. And we've got to be in the forefront of this struggle. And it's going to mean standing up and telling the truth. It's going to mean seeing ourselves as constructive agitators for change. For in the immortal words of Frederick Douglass: "Where there is not struggle, there can be no progress. Those who champion freedom but deprecate agitation, are those who want crops without plowing the land, who want rain without thunder and lightening, who want the ocean without the awful roar of its mighty waters." Thank you very much, and God bless you. ■

FOCUS *is printed on recycled paper with soy-based ink.*

FOCUS

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
1090 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20005-4961
202-789-3500

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Postmaster: Form 3547 requested

IMPORTANT!

NOTICE TO READERS: Please notify *FOCUS* of any change of address or title. YOU MUST ATTACH THE MAILING LABEL FROM THE BACK COVER when writing about service or change of address. No change can be made without this information. Allow 6 weeks for change of address to take effect. Thank you.

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT No. 6958
Washington, D.C.