

BLACK POWER REVISITED

By Gary James

GaryJoseJames@gmail.com

The ongoing quest of Black Americans to achieve political, economic and social equity are characteristic of a perpetual serial drama with the full range of successes, failures, intrigues, expectations, detractors, trials, challenges and tribulations. Apart from the seriousness of the past and current situation that plagues the Black community at large, the plethora of stories and circumstances have an entertainment factor in retrospect that is both engaging and enlightening to all interested observers.

For more than four hundred (400) years Africans enslaved in America provided a rich and colorful trail and sequence of events that chronicles their legitimate attempts for full enfranchisement as citizens of the "New World." This odyssey comprises classic American history as well as informs the global community relative to the sophistication of the American political, economic and social system. Needless to say, the American political, economic and social system is in many ways a microcosm of how the world operates and the lot of Black folk wherever they are.

Paradoxically, this is the first decade of the 21st century and many of the issues and conditions that beset Black America in the 19th and 20th centuries remain. Despite advances and victories on many fronts, during the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War and the modern civil rights movement, the political, economic and social conditions are virtually unchanged for Black Americans at large.

Subsequent to the Emancipation Proclamation (1862), Black Americans were the only "racial minority" of numerical consequence in the country. Black Americans are still arguably the largest "ethnic minority" in the country, although there is a broad range of other ethnic minorities that constitute today's citizenry. Yet the Black community at large is the weakest community in terms of political power and leverage as compared to all other "minority" groups. What accounts for

this dilemma that continues to plague the masses of Black folk? In view of the profound achievement of the very few Black Americans, some suggest and attempt to prove that there is an inherent deficiency associated with Black folk in general.

When one makes a cursory observation of the global Black community, the Black American political, economic and social dilemma becomes ubiquitous. What are the elements and factors that perpetuate this situation in Black America? How is the status quo of Black America maintained? What are the elements and factors that keep the global Black community in political, economic and social poverty?

Toward the end of the modern civil rights era perhaps about 1966 Kwami Toure (Stokely Carmichael) popularized the phrase "Black Power." Kwami Toure was the Chairman of SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordination Committee), a youth movement that was more often than not at odds with tactics of the civil rights movement leadership. The phrase "Black Power" was embraced by the various youth organizations and components; but the civil rights and elected Black leadership denounced the phrase and its youthful proponents as too radical. The "Black Power" movement and the war in Viet Nam became two wedge issues that separated the youth and adult political movements in the 1960's.

The late and great Congressman Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was virtually the only Black elected official to embrace Kwami Toure and the concept of "Black Power, and provided the public an analogy of the phrase. The glib Congressman Powell put "Black Power" in context and made the point to news reporters that "Black Power" was no different than "Polish" or "Jewish" power. And Congressman Powell Jr. was sensitive to the war issue as well. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did not embrace "Black Power" but ultimately became an anti-Viet Nam War advocate, a central "Black Power" issue. Kwami Toure also played no small part in Rev. King's conversion on the war question. Both Congressman Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were widely criticized by their peers for their respective political positions. Hence the phrase "Black Power" became a politically radio active as term,

not to be uttered by “responsible” or “mainstream” Black political leadership.

During the mid 1970’s the phrase evolved to “Black empowerment” and then it split in two to form “political empowerment” and “economic empowerment.” Finally “Black empowerment” was positioned as a Black “racist” idea and has virtually disappeared from the political lexicon. During the process of translation the essential identity of the power to be achieved was lost and “political” and “economic” empowerment became an individual or elitist Black achievement. Perhaps with the light and wisdom of hindsight the concept of “Black Power” and its various political, economic and social elements and derivatives should be revisited.

With the benefit of hindsight this trilogy advances an historical perspective and context to explore the political, economic and social dynamic that reinforces the Black American dilemma of poverty and powerlessness. The exit strategy from this political, economic and social quagmire will require the application of “Black Power” consciousness and not the rhetoric of a vague slogan or articulation of “hip” phrases. The question of whether the objective of “Black Power” is politically correct or racist is superfluous political subterfuge in the opinion of this writer. The requisite Black political, economic and social power must be a synthesis of the historic as well as real-time situation that challenges the Black community at large.

The three books that comprise the trilogy make historical observations of various social constructs, institutional components and practical ideas that embody the overall political, economic and social experience of Black folk. Hopefully, a comparative assessment and analysis of the various institutional components, how they intersect and facilitate an experiential redundancy that seems to reinforce perpetual poverty. Fortunately, an exit strategy from the dilemma is in the grasp of Black Americans irrespective of their current station in life.

Obviously, Black folk are going to have to do things differently in order to achieve a different and desired result. Of the many things that must be done differently are long range planning, preparation and application in all relevant areas. The planning should be preceded by an in dept

study and analysis of how the American political, economic and social system works. The purpose of the trilogy “Black Power” Revisited is to help inspire and help facilitate the process of study, evaluation, synthesis, strategic formulation and application.

Race politics in transition?

From the very founding of America a racial dichotomy (White & Black) and juxtaposition was the philosophical construct of the political, economic and social system. Although the notion of racial distinctions had no scientific and factual basis, racial superiority Vs inferiority continues to be the operative social construct in virtually every aspect of American life. While the truth relative to the falsity of racial distinctions has been known for many decades, recent advances in science coupled with archeological finds have unequivocally established the fact that human beings are essentially one race, which originated in Africa.

The race juxtaposition in the framework of the inferiority of African American slaves was the principle factor that caused the Civil War and the race dichotomy continues to be the emotional trigger that energizes and animates the political and electoral process. While the North in the context of the Union Army won the Civil War, the South for its part won the battle in that De Facto segregation became common law in the south until the modern civil rights movement. Despite the advances of the civil rights movement in desegregating the south, a Presidential candidate must currently have a successful southern strategy in order to prevail whether he or she is a Democrat or Republican.

A substantive and sustained change in how the Black community is organized and deployed in the framework of the Democrat and Republican Parties is the road to “Black Power.” Heretofore, Black folk have played the either or political party game because of the way they (Black Americans) were organized by White Republicans in the 19th century and by White Democrats of the 20th century during the modern civil right movement. In order to achieve “Black Power” in the 21st century, the Black community must be the priority, not “all people of color” or the “minority” community. Politics and the electoral process is not a

magnanimous exercise or a game of friends and enemies. There are no permanent friends and enemies in politics, only permanent interest is the perennial quote. And the process of give and take is termed political “hardball.” Black folk have been organized to play political “softball” only.

Political parties, labels, slogans, and personalities do not embody, embrace or have a particular relevance to Black Americans. The achievement of “Black Power” requires that Black folk organize and deploy themselves among the political parties strategically.

Emancipation Budget...

Various studies and some individuals have pointed out that Black Americans spend 600 billion dollars annually and the benefits thereof are essentially lost to the Black community. The problem is compounded because apparently there are no plans in place to address the economic imperative of wealth creation in the Black community. Interestingly enough, when one examines the civil rights movements in the 19th and 20th centuries it is observed that Black Americans were by and large participant beneficiaries along with the Republican (Abolitionists) movement in the 19th century and liberal Democrats (Progressives) in the 20th century respectively. White organizers financed both civil rights movements primarily while Blacks Americans provided the physical capital (numbers) that electoral politics is measured by. Black Americans were organized politically based on the philosophical and theoretical application of the political process. But the political and electoral process cannot operate or be sustained on philosophy and theory it requires an ongoing financial investment.

Money is the mother’s milk of politics and he who pays the piper calls the tune. Accordingly Black political officials owe their re-election campaigns to interests other than the Black community. The Black community has been politically organized to focus on their numbers and not sufficiently on their cucumbers (money). And investing financially in politics is generally not in the realm of possibilities for the Black dollar. Black Americans for the most part only spend their money to buy something tangible and object oriented. Spending money on

something without an instant gratification does not compute very well with most Black folk.

Black folk have yet to finance their political emancipation and the internal financial potential lies dormant for the lack of a vision and plan for investing economically and politically. From a pure economic standpoint the potential ROI (Return on Investment) from a 600 billion dollar annual market is an attractive investment. Therefore, political investment banking by Black Americans in the advancement of the Black community seems to be a no brainer. But the idea of financial investing and the building of economic wealth is a low agenda item among Black Americans for any number of reasons.

Once upon a time there was a place called the Black Wall Street, located in Tulsa Oklahoma, prior to the modern civil rights movement. History records that Black Americans in this town achieved unprecedented financial success and a formula for creating wealth in the Black community. Their growing financial success as a community angered their White counterparts who began a campaign of terror among Blacks and ultimately and literally burned the town down force most Black Americans to flee from the area.

Since the Tulsa Black Wall Street phenomenon, finance and business culture has been a weak suit of the Black community. There is an overriding “good job” mentality that pervades the Black community. And career objectives resulting from higher education is generally employment oriented. Other than the “individualists” and “elitists” who have access to capital and the kinds of financial instruments for wealth creation and community economic development, most other Black Americans are preoccupied with the basic survival scenario. Hence, there are only a few that have the disposition, commitment and responsibility to make sacrifices for the many. Needless to say, 600 billion dollars annually is an attractive investment opportunity for the visionary Black entrepreneur. Surely there is sufficient financial and economic potential to financial an emancipation budget for the 21st century.