


The Greatest Story Never Told

Everyday

By
Deroy
Murdock

America's

Racial Harmony



It's August 2 in New York's Central Park as radical black poet Amiri Baraka reads a poem to musical accompaniment. "Suppose you was so out, your murder was not a crime," says Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones). "Suppose you are the usual suspect in any crime, even those committed against you?" Baraka then recites a string of racial epithets: "Shine, Woogie, Rug head, Spear chucker, coon, jigaboo...." ■ In the back of the Summer Stage audience, a young white guy in a blue T-shirt strokes his chin and looks puzzled. And why not? Baraka heaps his avalanche of black victimology upon a friendly, well-integrated crowd of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian spectators. They cheerfully sway on a sun-splashed Sunday to the sounds of black American and African musicians. A blond woman dances with abandon behind a black baby's stroller.

The congregation at the Greater New Bethel Baptist Church, joins hands during a prayer vigil for James Byrd, Jr. Wednesday, June 10, 1998 in Jasper, Texas. (AP Photo/Pat Sullivan)



Residents of Jasper, TX—a town many journalists dismissed as a bigoted backwater—united after their tragedy.

The sunshine bounces off the gray chest hairs that upholster an older white man twirling beside several black patrons. Beneath a shady tree, a white woman laughs and chats in French with a half-dozen young African men as dark as the night is long. They seem to be old friends. Against these scenes of racial tranquility, Baraka is on stage yelling: “liver lips, sambo, boy, Burr head, property, darkie, ink spot....”

His words sound oddly alien to a country that quietly has eased racial tensions. While left-wing activists like the Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton complain constantly about what they consider the white man’s never-ending war against minorities, Americans of different ethnic backgrounds actually are making peace with each other. They’re demonstrating quite clearly that, to paraphrase Rodney King, we all *can* just get along.

But don’t tell that to America’s so-called “black leaders.” They see a bigot under every bed. “Everywhere we see clear racial fault lines, which divide American society as much now as at anytime in our past,” NAACP chairman Julian Bond declared last May 27.

“Hardly an aspect of American life has escaped the baneful touch of this awful thing called racism,” said historian John Hope Franklin, chairman of President Clinton’s advisory board on race, in July 1997. “Wherever you go, you are going to see this.”

“We are the victims of racism in this society,” Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) announced in June 1997.

Jim Sleeper, author of *Liberal Racism*, believes “there is a race industry that has a moral and financial stake in ginning up these racial bogeymen.” As he says by phone: “There is a real effort to play up the bad news and play down the good.... The ground is shifting under our feet, and a lot of these people don’t want to let go.”

Neither Sleeper nor anyone else argues that bigotry is extinct. Those who think so need only consider the case of James Byrd, Jr. Words as ugly as those hurled by Amiri Baraka may have been the last things Byrd heard on June 7, when three white ex-convicts picked up the disabled 49-year-old black man as he hitchhiked. In an horrific crime that shocked and outraged Americans, they chained him to their pickup truck and dragged him to death by the ankles.

But this atrocity overshadowed the racial harmony that the people of Jasper, Texas, previously enjoyed, and soon worked diligently to restore. The town that many journalists dismissed as a bigoted backwater united after this tragedy. Jasper’s black mayor, R. C. Horn, and both black and white ministers led

Jasper’s 8,000 citizens in interracial rallies and joint prayer vigils. With love and respect, they convened to protest the human tragedy that had befallen their neighbor. After one service, the mixed crowd hugged and sang “We Shall Overcome.”

In a half-hearted attempt at healing, even a few members of the Ku Klux Klan showed up to “denounce what has happened.” They explained that there were some things even *they* could not applaud. Hate without homicide seems like progress, of a sort. When the New Black Panther Party arrived to protest the June 27 Klan demonstration, most Jasper residents avoided both groups, and asked outsiders to leave them in peace.

Jasper’s racial reconciliation mirrors that which occurred when the media diagnosed an epidemic of supposedly anti-black church fires that turned out to be far less incendiary. As journalist Michael Fumento explains, only three of over 70 church fires investigated by *USA Today* and the Department of Justice could be tied to racial animosity. The federal Church Arson Task Force likewise uncovered few racial links. Several burned black churches were struck by lightning. Others were torched for insurance money. Young vandals set still more ablaze. Many were burned by copy-cat arsonists fueled, ironically, by media condemnation of previous fires. One-third of those arrested were black.

Well before the “racist arson” theory was debunked, white churchgoers embraced the black faithful. The Christian Coalition established a \$1 million Save the Churches Fund to help rebuild black houses of worship. Ralph Reed, the Christian Coalition’s then-executive director, met with black ministers in June 1996. “We come not trying to preach to others,” he said, but to learn from those who struggled “for racial justice, a cause which in the past the white evangelical church failed to embrace, to its great shame.” What began as a wave of reputedly anti-black arson became a cause for bridge building between blacks and whites.

The January 16, 1997 death of Ennis Cosby—son of comedian Bill Cosby and his wife Camille—has been portrayed as a brutal bias crime that was inevitable in this hopelessly racist society. “I believe America taught our son’s killer to hate African Americans,” Mrs. Cosby wrote in *USA Today*. “Racism and prejudice are omnipresent and eternalized in America’s institutions, media, and myriad entities.”

Ennis Cosby’s murder, however, looks like little more than a simple, vicious street crime, perpetrated by a Ukrainian immigrant named Mikail Markhasev. While perhaps not an ethnic Eden, today’s America mostly teaches tolerance to arrivals from other countries. Why did 40 percent of U.S. respondents recently

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select Bill Cosby as “the nation’s top dad” if these really are the United States of Racism? Why does a racist Amerikkka buy Bill Cosby’s hugely successful books, watch his TV shows, and buy the Jell-O Pudding Pops he endorses? Beyond the national outpouring of grief at her son’s senseless death, Mrs. Cosby overlooks stark material proof of America’s affection for her husband: a decades-long stream of big money. In 1997 alone, *Forbes* reports Cosby earned \$18 million. This demonstrated public fondness underscores the folly of Camille Cosby’s theory of innate American bigotry—unless one believes that people give money, by the vault-full, to those they hate.

For that matter, would white bigots vote for blacks? Whites increasingly choose blacks to represent them in office. New York State Comptroller Carl McCall, Ohio State Treasurer Kenneth Blackwell, Colorado Secretary of State Vikki Buckley, U.S. Senator Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois, and former Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder are examples of black Democrats and Republicans favored by heavily white electorates.

Despite these concrete achievements, some black politicians still see racially gerrymandered districts as the only way to secure electoral victories for blacks. In December 1995, the NAACP’s Theodore Shaw predicted that, thanks to Supreme Court decisions against using race as the primary factor in reapportionment, “the Congressional Black Caucus will be able to meet in the back seat of a taxicab.” Deval Patrick, then-Assistant U.S. Attorney for Civil Rights, foresaw “a return to the days of all-white government.” The Reverend Jesse Jackson feared “a kind of ethnic cleansing.” But despite such overwrought rhetoric, all 35 black incumbent Members of Congress on the ballot in November 1996 were re-elected save one, Representative Gary Franks (R-Conn.), who lost to an opponent who called him an aloof slumlord. Franks’ defeat was offset by Indianapolis Democrat Julia Carson, who won 53 percent of the vote in a 69 percent white district.

Representative Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) fretted that she would lose her seat after the Supreme Court found the racially rigged Fourth Congressional District unconstitutional in June 1995. Yet she managed to beat John Mitnick, a moderate Republican who happens to be Jewish, in a new, majority-white district said to be populated by the highest number of Jewish voters in the South. Final score: McKinney 58 percent, Mitnick 42.

Even the Monica Lewinsky scandal, of all things, offers lessons on improved race relations and black advancement. As writer Evan Gahr observes, when Zippergate first ensnared Americas white, Southern president, who did he call for help but Vernon Jordan, the black super-lawyer and Beltway fixer. Monica’s close friend in the West Wing theoretically was Betty Currie, the well-regarded personal secretary to the President of the United States. Larry Cockell—the black man who guards President Clinton as head of the Secret Service’s personal protective detail—testified in this case. But before that, federal Judge Norma Holloway Johnson, also black, led the parade of jurists who ruled that Cockell and other agents must testify. Team Lewinsky also includes her publicist, Judy Smith, and attorney Billy Martin, both black.

The involvement of these professionals in this high-profile case exemplifies both black success and the everyday black-white cooperation that now exists despite the incessant

rhetoric about bigoted bogeymen. If America must endure a sex-and-lies fiasco, it might as well be an integrated one.

Corroborating evidence of America’s growing racial amity can be found in the dramatic decrease in anti-Semitism. The Anti-Defamation League reported an 8.8 percent drop in anti-Semitic vandalism and other crimes last year. As Irving Kristol has remarked: “the danger facing American Jews today is not that Christians want to persecute them, but that Christians want to marry them.” According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 52 percent of American Jews intermarry with Gentiles.

Intermarriage exists among many groups. The 1990 Census found 1.4 million interracial married couples in America. In 1970, 0.7 percent of black women married white men; by 1993, that number had increased more than five-fold to 3.9 percent. Among black men in 1970, 1.9 percent married white women. That figure more than quadrupled to 8.9 percent in 1993.

The numbers are even higher among other ethnicities. As John J. Miller reports in his book, *The Unmaking of Americans*, in 1990, 28 percent of all marriages involving someone of Mexican ancestry also included a non-Hispanic. Half of Americans of Japanese descent marry people without Japanese roots. Miller observes that intermarriage among whites once was noteworthy. “When an Irish American married an Italian American 75 years ago,” he writes, “it was probably a big deal in the neighborhood. But no more. In the future, everyone will have a Korean grandmother.”

Of course, interracial couples most profoundly blur America’s ethnic lines by having mixed children. The 1990 Census discovered 2 million minors who were “of a different race than one or both of their parents.” This trend has grown so widespread that some multi-racial couples demanded a “mixed race” box on the 2000 Census form. After much deliberation, the Census Bureau instead decided to allow Americans to describe themselves by filling as many racial-category boxes as they wish.

Couples who adopt also find that race lines are drawn in chalk rather than ink, if at all. Despite the National Association of Black Social Workers’ claim that trans-racial adoption is “cultural genocide,” Congress easily passed the Multiethnic Placement Act in 1994. It prohibits racial discrimination in adoption, and blocks federal funds to social-service agencies that prevent interracial adoption. This measure was strengthened in 1996.

Last June, I accompanied a group of college students to the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta. These white youths and I, a 34-year-old black man, were equally startled by the surreal Jim Crow laws on display at the Center. One ordinance required all circuses visiting Louisiana to maintain separate entrances for white and black spectators. Another demanded separate buildings for black and white residents at an institution for the blind.

That world might as well be Mars. Americans may never be as truly colorblind as the occupants of that home for the sightless, but in U.S. churches, TV studios, voting booths, and even bedrooms, one thing is becoming clear: The land where individuals would “not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character”—as Dr. King put it—seems every day more a reality than a 35-year-old dream.





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Why is America's Black Middle Class

Strangely Fragile?

By
Richard
Miniter



Today's black professional is sometimes an invisible man. Even the President's national initiative on race has focused obsessively on the poor and unsuccessful, and ignored the burgeoning black middle class. Partly because they are prosperous, partly because their lives don't readily supply the props necessary to stage a debate about the role of government, the press and pundits don't see black professionals. Confounding both liberal and conservative clichés about economic progress as they do—while also pointing to some vital unfinished racial business—the members of the black middle class are worth a closer look.

Black professionals defy easy categorization. Many are like Lorna Holt, an independent television producer who lives in San

Francisco with her husband, Eric, who is white and teaches in an inner-city Oakland high school. She understands discrimination firsthand, though not the kind usually cited by liberals.

From her first day in kindergarten, Lorna knew she was different from the other students at Sixth Avenue Elementary School in south-central Los Angeles. She spoke both Spanish and English with ease, like an Hispanic student. But her light black skin and kinky hair seemed to place her with the African Americans. Her high grades and good behavior only brought her abuse from all sides. "Tryin' to act white?" her classmates would taunt. "Oreo!" "Teacher's pet!" She would hear those insults, over and over, for the next 12 years. Her only close friends were Asian immigrants.