

Civil War Sesquicentennial, Part Three

This is our final look at the launch in Michigan of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War.

September 2012 will be 150 years since the preliminary issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Dr. King called it “the door to self-liberation” by and for Blacks.

This past June, The Henry Ford in Dearborn sponsored a visit of the actual Proclamation, loaned by the National Archives under tight security. The exhibition began on a Monday at 6 p.m. and ran through the next day and night, closing at 6 a.m. Wednesday. Michigan was privileged to host the original document, for it rarely leaves Washington and isn't always on exhibit. And Michigan deserved the honor: some 21,000 people viewed the artifact, many of whom stood in line many hours for just a few seconds of viewing.

Also this year, a new book made its appearance entitled “Michigan and the Civil War: A Great and Bloody Sacrifice.” The book strives for authenticity and inclusiveness. It tells the story of how Michigan came together to win the Civil War, how Michiganders played key roles

in the abolition of slavery, and how our soldiers and civilians were key to the ultimate victory. Chapters describe the story of the black infantry regiment recruited from Michigan, the Native Americans who enlisted as sharpshooters, and the handful of women who disguised themselves to fight in uniform. All of the author proceeds go to help finance Michigan's 150th commemoration and thus contribute to better understanding of the full and complete history of the Civil War.

These events, and others, all come together to demonstrate that the Sesquicentennial is off to a great start.

Next year, the second year of the commemoration should be a model of how the Civil War was transformed in 1862 from a struggle to restore the Union to a war for freedom.

The Michigan Historical Commission remains open to participation of any and all Michiganders in its Civil War Sesquicentennial commemoration. Contact the Commission if you would like to help it construct an appropriate, authentic, inclusive program.

Cornel West's pursuit to destroy Obama presidency is self-destructive politics

Part 2

Dear Cornel,

The problem with the kind of editorial you have written for the Times is that you are not required to suggest any policy options or strategies for achieving them. It does not take much to demonstrate that your argument is morally pretentious empty rhetoric, a hysterical rant that leads nowhere.

Do you really think this nation, and the Black community especially, would be better off if the banking system had failed, if the president had stood back and allowed the world financial system to collapse? If you do you are the most highly educated moron in history, a worthy ally of the Tea Party! If you don't believe it you are a dangerous charlatan and hypocrite and therefore of one heart with the so-called “Tea Party Patriots.”

Instead of pointing out that President Obama has passed the most stringent regulations on Wall Street since the 1930's, and nominated Elizabeth Warren, the brilliant Harvard Law professor and longtime advocate for the poor, to head the new agency, you attack him for saving the world financial system from collapse.

Instead of denouncing the Republicans for refusing to confirm Professor Warren and fund the agency tasked with implementing the new financial regulations, while opposing any attempt to tax the rich, who are sitting on record profits, you attack the president for the success of the business community which is the engine that propels this economy.

Rising profits in the corporate sector is proof that the president's policies to save the economy from a great depression that many economists believe would have been worse than the 1930s has succeeded.

That's how capitalism works, Cornel. And, in spite of the fact that both of us wish it were otherwise, Americans overwhelmingly support capitalism. If the Democrats were in control of the Congress, however, they would have done away with the Bush tax cuts and raised the effective corporate tax rate by terminating many of the tax write offs that they presently enjoy. It is the Republicans that are preventing this from hap-

pening, but you continue to blame the president.

Your actions in this regard is leading some of your critics to conclude that you are really a paid agent for the plutocrats, especially since your so-called “Poverty Tour” designed to embarrass the president is paid for by a major commercial bank — a false witness with a hidden agenda designed to so confuse the issues that many who voted for President Obama in the last election will stay at home this time and give the election to the Republicans.

That's what some folks are beginning to say about you, Cornel. However, I am not one of them. In my view it doesn't matter if you are a paid agent of the right or not, because I can't imagine what you would do differently if you were a paid agent. As the New York Times columnist Charles Blow has demonstrated by crunching the numbers: If everybody who voted for the president votes for him in the coming election, but 10% of African-Americans who voted stay at home, Barack Obama will lose. The result will be an unmitigated disaster for the least among us, the people you claim to care about the most.

While your op-ed is full of hysterical moral masquerading and pretentious sophistry preening as deep thought, with false analogies popping up everywhere like Banquo's ghost, you never rise to what I believe is your true calling in the great struggle to determine whether civilization or savagery shall triumph in America.

Sometimes you tease us with the possibility that you recognize your role, but you never rise to the occasion. A poignant case in point is the following observation: “King's response to our crisis can be put in one word: revolution. A revolution in our priorities, a re-evaluation of our values, a reinvigoration of our public life and a fundamental transformation of our way of thinking and living that promotes a transfer of power from oligarchs and plutocrats to everyday people and ordinary citizens.”

Obviously this transformation is a matter that is far beyond the control of any politician. This is work for preachers, philosophers and theologians. — *Playthell G. Benjamin, Harlem, New York*

Detroit's throughfare to nowhere

By Bill Johnson

Detroit's bus system is woefully out of date and plagued by decades of parts shortages, vehicle maintenance and labor problems, declining ridership and mounting complaints. Passengers are stranded for hours when buses don't run on time or often enough. The working poor are severely limited in their ability to get to their job.

A city that can't keep its buses running on time can't be expected to build, efficiently manage and operate a multimillion light rail system. But Mayor Dave Bing is forging ahead with plans to construct such a system down Woodward Avenue. It will travel along a thoroughfare to nowhere.

Whether due to sophisticated work stoppages or lack of funds, incentives for DDOT employees to do better are hard to come by. A perennial money loser, there is little potential to make the decrepit bus system more efficient without tremendous overruns.

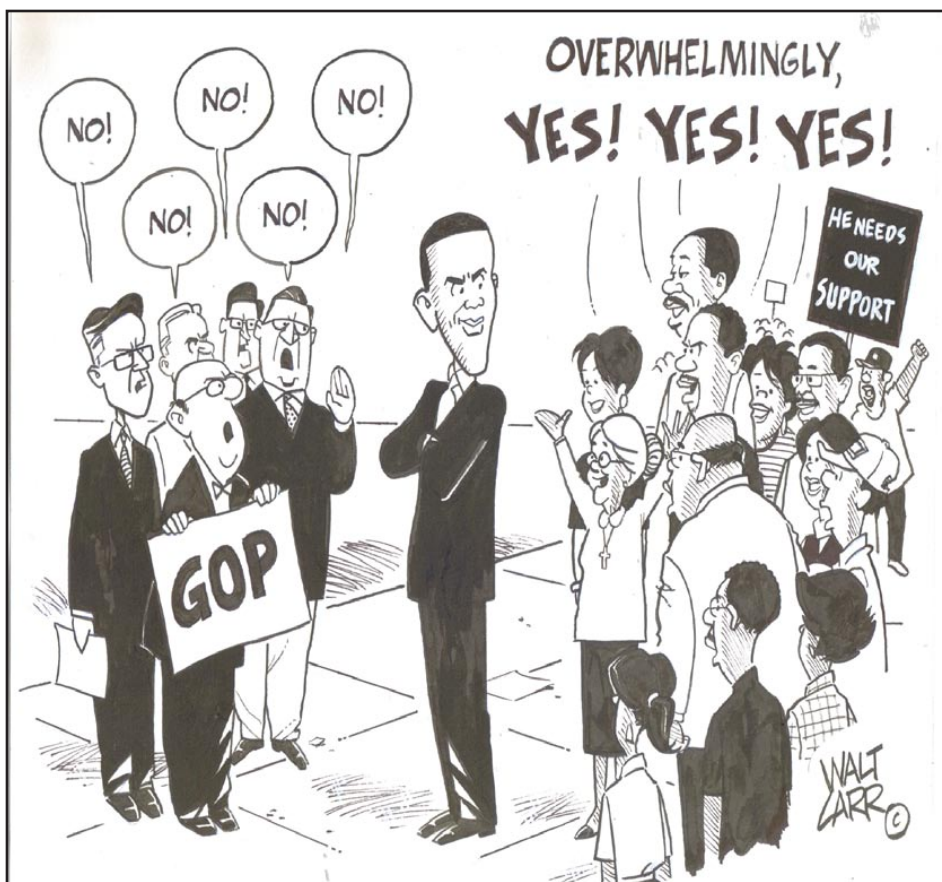
Because DDOT is crippled by pension and other structural costs, it explains in

part why Detroit is the only big city not to merge its bus operation into a regional system. But then, SMART, the suburban bus system, suffers from many of the same management problems.

This historical backdrop makes the planned light rail route a wasteful pursuit. However, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who recently came to town to glorify the project slated to end just south of Eight Mile Road, appeared to ignore the reality.

“It holds enormous promise,” said LaHood, adding, “It will become the anchor for a lot of planning and a lot of discussion about the regional approach to transportation. It will create jobs. It will create a new choice of transportation.”

LaHood's premise, reasoning and rhetoric are false. First, there is a need for a well-run, efficient bus system in the city and the suburbs. But there is no mass transit need crying out for a solution in Detroit. In order for light rail to justify its enormous capital expenditure and high operating costs, it would have to connect the originations and destina-



Diluting the Black vote?

By George Curry

After decades of trying to ease voting restrictions that suppress voter turnout in the U.S., already among the lowest among industrialized nations, Republican-led state legislators and GOP governors have quickly implemented or proposed a series of changes aimed at reducing Black political clout.

Among the recent developments to limit Black voter participation:

- At least 34 states have introduced legislation that would require voters to show photo identification in order to vote;

- At least 12 states have introduced bills that would require proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate, to register or vote;

- At least 13 states have introduced legislation to end popular Election Day and same-day voter registration;

- At least nine states have introduced bills to reduce their early voting periods and

- Two states – Florida and Iowa – have reversed prior executive orders making it easier for ex-felons to vote.

These voter suppression efforts are detailed in a recent report by the Brennan Center at New York University's School of Law titled, *Voting Law Changes in 2012*.

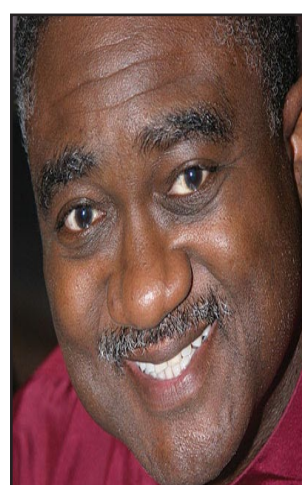
“The general thrust of the law over the past few decades has been to ease registration requirements to make it easier for eligible citizens to get on the voter rolls,” the report stated. “The most significant advance was the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, also known as the ‘Motor Voter’ law, which made voter registration opportunities widely available across the country. More recently, states have taken the lead in modernizing their voter registration systems so that more voters are getting on the rolls and the rolls are getting more accurate.”

However, that's no longer the case.

“This year, the tide reversed,” the report observed. “Instead of efforts to increase voter registration, this year new registration requirements have been introduced that will make it more challenging for eligible voters to ensure that they are registered to vote on Election Day. Voter registration regulations range from restrictions on individuals and groups who help register voters, to efforts to scale back Election Day and same-day registration, to new rules making it harder for voters to stay registered after they move.”

These new restrictions could have a significant impact on the outcome of the 2012 presidential election. The states that have already placed further restrictions on voting will provide 171 electoral votes in 2012 – 63 percent of the 270 needed to win the presidency. Of the 12 battleground states, five have already cut back on voting rights and two more are considering following their lead.

Most of the public attention on voter disenfranchisement has centered on voter identification laws. Prior to 2006, no state required its voters to show government-issued ID, according to



George Curry

the study. In 2006, Indiana became the first state to require voters to show a government-issued photo ID. This year, 34 states introduced similar legislation. Of those, seven have been enacted so far: Alabama, Kansas, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin. The type of government ID accepted is also an issue. Texas, for example, will recognize permits to carry concealed weapons, but not student IDs from state universities.

The partial or full elimination of early voting on Sundays will certainly

reduce the Black vote. Ohio has eliminated all in-person early voting on Sundays. Florida has eliminated it for the last Sunday before Election Day. And North Carolina is considering eliminating all in-person voting on Sundays.

The Sunday restrictions target “Souls to the Polls” campaign popular in African-American churches. Forbidding early voting on the last Sunday before an election hurts Blacks. Florida is a perfect example. In the 2008 general election, 32.2 percent of those who voted early on the last Sunday were Black and 23.6 percent were Latino (Blacks represent 13.4 percent of all early voters in the state and Latinos 11.6 percent).

The movement to restore the rights of the formerly incarcerated has also hit a roadblock.

Since 1997, according to the report, 23 states have either restored voting rights for the formerly incarcerated or eased the restoration process.

“By executive action, Governors Terry Branstad of Iowa and Rick Scott of Florida, both Republicans, returned their state policies to de facto permanent disenfranchisement,” the report said. Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, also a Republican, vetoed a bill with bipartisan support that would have automatically restored voting rights to anyone who honorably completed a felony sentence and probation or parole.

One of most serious threats to Black voting is the curbs being placed on community groups that assist in voter registration, such as the National Coalition on Black Voter Participation.

Texas is considering a proposal that would require anyone who registers voters to first be deputized and attend mandatory training that ends with an exam. On May 19, Florida Gov. Rick Scott signed a new law that requires voter registration groups to pre-register with the state before engaging in voter registration activity and mandates that every voter registration form collected be presented to county officials within 48 hours of signature. Those who don't comply face civil penalties. In addition, the group conducting the voter registration must place their state-issued ID code on each form collected from a voter.

The net results of these new laws could mean the disenfranchisement of at least 5 million voters, the Brennan Center report noted. Republicans have made it clear that their primary goal is to defeat President Obama in 2012. What they are not saying is that they hope to do that by suppressing the Black vote.

tions of large numbers of riders to thriving business and job centers.

Detroit doesn't come close to traffic congestion or gridlock. The city is beginning to show signs of life through subsidized businesses moving employees to the central city. But there is no evidence it has become a magnet for job creators without incentives.

The rationale that the investment will eventually justify itself by promoting high-density developments near stations doesn't hold up either. The landscape beneath the People Mover destroys that fallacy.

Rail systems don't come close to breaking even, even when capital costs are factored out. DDOT and the People Mover are already heavily subsidized and Detroit is likely to incur even larger operating deficits when a light rail is added to the commuting scheme and fails to attract enough riders. Even more nonsensical is that it would duplicate SMART and DDOT routes.

Another false promise is that mass transit will connect the city's unem-

ployed with jobs in the suburbs. There may be good reasons for a mass transit system, but the contention that jobless Detroiters could find work outside the city if they could commute to where the jobs are isn't one of them.

Admittedly, there are people who are disconnected from the low-skilled manufacturing and service jobs that shifted sharply away from the city to the suburbs. There also is evidence that the reason many Detroiters remain locked in economic subordination has more to do with lack of skills among the labor force than a lack of transportation. It makes no sense to spend millions for a rail system that begins and ends in the city limits and serves no real commuter needs.

To make large public investments in a fixed-rail system is to pursue an economic and policy agenda without merit. It is destined to be another urban status symbol erected amidst severe infrastructure and population decline. It will have as much value in solving the city's transit needs as the dysfunctional, money-losing bus system.