

“BEYOND THE RHETORIC”

Harry C. Alford

The Jena 6 Starts a New Era

One of the greatest days in recent history was the Million Man March. One leader, Honorable Louis Farrakhan, called out to Black males to assemble for atonement and a new start. 1.6 million African American males from all demographics responded and participated. One of the biggest lessons learned from it is that we don't need the mass media to communicate with each other. The message carried through word of mouth, individually owned Black newspapers, radio stations and the infrastructure of the Nation of Islam. It was shocking to mainstream America that we could organize ourselves without the “appointed” or “self proclaimed” leaders guiding us down a specific path. African Americans gained new respect on that great day and we are now better for it. Education, marriage and entrepreneurship have increased greatly since that Day of Atonement.

Ultra conservatives, i.e. racists, have been reeling in fear from the Million Man March. They want the mainstream media to paint a picture of a nation that no longer has a racial problem and there is no discrimination. They want to end affirmative action and wish people of color would just go away. We won't go away and we demand our share of the power, economically and politically. That's the rub. Anything Black and dealing with communication is under attack. Black advertising firms, marketing firms, television, radio and especially the Black press are under a constant economic attack. They will buy out the rising entities and try to kill the established one. Communication vehicles provide vital information and information is, indeed, Power. Power translates to control, money and freedom.

That old phrase by Gil Scott Heron, “I heard it from the drums”, means a lot today. Whatever it takes we must establish communication lines whether they are primitive or high tech. Our ancestors who had no other vehicle outside of word of mouth used their drums to communicate decrees or edicts from the leaders. It made individual tribes a nation of one. Today, we don’t have to rely on primitive means as this world has evolved to cutting edge technology that is accessible by the vast majority of us.

Jena, Louisiana is a sleepy town outside of Alexandria, Louisiana which is a relatively small town in itself. It’s in the middle of the Deep South. Discrimination and blatant racism has lingered there as with many sleepy Southern towns since the end of the Civil War. Policy and justice are not equitable to all. The rich have their way and the majority rules with a strong hand. The majority of Jena is overwhelmingly white and tradition has dictated that they could do to Blacks whatever they pleased without recourse. The latest injustice hammered on the 6 young brothers in this town caught the attention of this entire nation. Through what few radio stations we have left, our Black newspapers and above all the Internet we sent out the alarm through our modern days “drums”.

New Black leaders have emerged from the strangest of places. DC radio disc jockey Michael Baisden (WHUR 96.3 FM) was informed about the injustices being levied on the 6 Black youths in Jena through his internet listeners. He decided to do something about it. He rallied his listeners and encouraged the bloggers (people who daily communicate with a database of internet responders) to send out the rallying call. It was sort of a “drum” network. As they discussed this situation more and more he declared, “Let’s go down to Jena and voice our outrage”. He and the bloggers came to a decision: On September 20, 2007, we will assemble in downtown Jena, Louisiana and show our support for the Jena 6.

September 20, 2007 became a glorious day in African American history. From the call of a radio disc jockey and a mass network of hundreds of bloggers came the largest Black policy assembly since the Million Man March. The white owned press will never tell us how many were actually there (they can’t count on matters like this) but my eyes tell me at least 50 thousand came. They were mostly college students who want to join the fight. Or should I say restart the fight. As the Civil Rights Struggle involved mostly college kids wanting to change the world, this Jena 6 exercise made the same statement. Our Black youth have resolved to change the world and fight the power once again.

They are our new leaders. These new leaders had our old leaders, Rev. This and Rev. That, following them. The new leaders were being followed by the old leaders. I appreciate their new found organizational ability and pledge my support. Lead on!!

Mr. Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO, of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.
Website: www.nationalbcc.org.