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Bruce's Beat
Halliburton's 'Immigration Emergency' Detention Centers
Legislative leaders are campaign cash funnels
The performance of Black leaders
and eMail from our readers
by **BC** Associate Editor Bruce Dixon

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In [last week's](#) Freedom Rider, **BC's** own Margaret Kimberly drew attention to the little-noticed news item that Halliburton had landed the no-bid contract to construct detention centers to be utilized in the event of what officials deem an “immigration emergency.”

Reader Linda O'Brien writes

Many thanks to the Black Commentator and Margaret Kimberley for writing more on the frighteningly under-reported story of Halliburton KBR's contract to build "emergency detention centers." When I first read of this in the New York Times, I was struck particularly by the comment that the centers would be used either for the influx of thousands of immigrants who apparently are poised on the border just over the ridge, or for "the rapid development of new programs." That's the kind of ambiguity that could fuel a whole X-Files episode.

I agree with Ms. Kimberley, this development is justifiable cause for paranoia. Paranoia really isn't even the right word, since common sense and self-preservation demand that the American people sit up and take notice. Congress should have stopped this if for no other reason than that Halliburton's history of corruption should preclude it from ever again getting a U.S. government contract. Those millions it wastes eventually add up to real money. I hear some people around New Orleans could use a little help.

Thanks again. Keep up the good work.

Yeah. We heard that about New Orleans too. And “immigration emergency” does sound like an X-Files episode. Former Halliburton CEO and co-president Dick Cheney and his gang, as Ms. Kimberly points out, have given us plenty to be paranoid about. These are sad and dangerous times indeed when the most optimistic scenario, as she puts it, is that this is a case of vast but straightforward no-bid corruption. And we cannot all be optimists.

Real journalists arm citizens with the real truths they need to stand up for their own rights. Margaret Kimberly is a real journalist and a great commentator, and we are blessed to have her on board.

If there were more Margaret Kimberleys and more editors in the corporate media who allowed their stories to reach the public, it would have been big news at the end of January that a Zogby poll of 897 likely Pennsylvania voters revealed that 84.9% of them would support a congressional candidate who favored impeachment. This is one of the latest pieces of potentially valuable and empowering news affirming that the vast majority of Democrats, and a much narrower majority of all Americans may favor impeaching the president and his gang. Such news, if it became more widely known, would inevitably lead more rank and file Democratic voters to ask why the Democratic Party's House and Senate campaign committees, whose function is to recruit and provide assistance to Democrats running for the House and Senate, are not beating the bushes for the strongest pro-impeachment candidates they can find as the surest strategy to tip the Congressional balance in the upcoming mid-term elections.

It is an open secret that instead of riding the impeachment donkey to a Congressional majority in the midterm elections, Democratic Party shot callers are threatening and discouraging pro-impeachment candidates. For those seeking a clue to this mysterious behavior, Jeff Blankfort's article in last week's *BC*, “Why Cynthia McKinney Lost Her Seniority and Didn't Get It Back” went to the heart of the riddle by examining Democratic House Leader Nancy Pelosi's shameful and inexplicable revocation of Rep. Cynthia McKinney's seniority.

Maceo Kemp was one of several readers to comment on that article:

Thank you, Mr. Blankfort, for your informative and insightful article about Cynthia McKinney. She is truly a lone voice for Truth among our elected officials in the Congress. Is there anything more that people may do to try and persuade the House leadership to restore Ms. McKinney's seniority?

George Wilson, another *BC* reader, sent us a very brief media message detailing what he thinks is the very simple reason behind the revocation of McKinney's seniority. The way he tells it,

You might call it Life. The alpha female punishes.

We respectfully disagree with Brother George. We at *BC* are certain that a better world is possible. People who believe this don't mistake the way things are at the moment for the way things ought to and can be. Rep. Pelosi is no “alpha female” and this is not “Life.” Legislative majority and minority leaders in both parties and houses of congress, and in state legislatures across the land act as funnels for literal rivers of campaign cash from corporations and wealthy donors which they direct to legislators and candidates that tow the corporate line and away from those that stray from the plantation.

Hence Rep. Pelosi as Democratic Minority Leader is no “alpha” anything. She is the middleperson in what her colleague Senator McCain has deemed an ongoing “sophisticated influence peddling scheme.” She is a cut-out, a bag man, or a bag lady. And when the legislative process and the Democratic Party itself is for

rent to its big donors in big oil, big pharma, to insurance companies, media monopolies, agribusiness, military contractors and the rest we don't call it "Life." We call it corruption.

This endemic corruption among the Democratic party's leadership is what makes it punish Georgia's 4th congressional district for having returned Cynthia McKinney to the House. It is the same corruption that drives it to threaten or discourage anti-war and pro-impeachment Democrats who want to run for the House or Senate, and it now threatens to prevent Democrats from taking control of the congress in this year's midterm elections.

Projecting today's savagely limited economic choices as "all there is" or all there ever can or should be is often mistaken for wisdom. Another of our readers, possibly infected with this malady, writes us:

Just read the article on Wal-Mart and sending this comment from a personal perspective.

I grew up in a small town not far from where I am now employed as a university professor. I remember when Wal-Mart first moved to the area and faced a lot of anti chain store, anti Wal-Mart resistance. I was skeptical my self, until I saw what happened to the community after they were established. Prior to Wal-Mart the small city was ruled by the controlling fathers and any economic activity was in the hands of a few citizens, including control of the school system. Employment of Blacks was controlled as well as where their money was spent. There were very few jobs given to Blacks, or I should say prestigious jobs that would build a future and self esteem. After Wal-Mart, things started to change. Blacks obtained decent paying jobs, and were allowed to become managers and hold responsible positions. There was no employment of college students in the city before Wal-Mart, but students were able to obtain jobs to pay their way through college while working at the local Wal-Mart. After Wal-Mart, other chain grocery stores were established and continued the hiring of Black citizens. Although the chain stores made a difference, the control factor continues to exist in the school system, enforcement authorities, and governing agencies.

I am not one to be an advocate of the existence of an entity that has its number one priority of making a profit, but the chain stores have provided goods at a reasonable price that low income persons can purchase, without having to endure the controlled system of buy on credit, and your check and life belongs to someone else.

Keep up the good work, but be careful of what someone else wishes.

John Fuller

BC's co-publisher Glen Ford, who spent a good deal of his childhood in rural Georgia, replies:

Dear "Doc" Fuller:

Sounds like you grew up in one of the many little places that most people who have any ambition leave as soon as possible – where pygmy potentates rule, and local white folks have nothing to be proud of except the fact that they aren't Black.

There are a lot of such places, and I suppose that – given the overarching pettiness and boredom that prevails – *anything* would seem like an improvement, even a Wal-Mart.

University students and other young transients would be happy, of course. They don't plan to remain at Wal-Mart after earning their degree; they're young and healthy, and probably won't

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need to have health insurance (which they won't get from Wal-Mart on part-time hours); and they don't have families to feed.

It's hard to empathize with the local white merchants that you describe as being so dreadful. Having lived in such places, I'm sure they were terrible people, especially when it came to hiring African Americans. At a gut level, I can't help but take pleasure at the thought of them being driven out of business. Or being run down by a truck.

And I'm glad that the locals don't have to bear the indignity of having to buy things on credit (not that Wal-Mart will give them credit, without a credit card). The town you describe seems to have been a relic of an almost semi-feudal past. Welcome to the United States of Wal-Mart, a modern corporation that provides almost no mobility for the vast majority of its workers, and forces other retailers to do the same. But at least, it's not the old town you remember. Right?

Let's spread the word to Black folks in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. They didn't have to leave Bumville, generations ago, to escape the petty oppressions of small town white elites and bored peckerwoods looking to mess with somebody below even their own lowly status. Had the Black families just stayed in Bumville a few more generations, they would have been saved by Wal-Mart. And now, Wal-Mart is coming to rescue their descendants from the perils of big city life. The Promised Land on the cheap.

Please excuse my sarcasm, Doc. We're glad you became a university professor, and were not locked into either Bumville's old racial stratification or Wal-Mart's new regime. At this rate, Bumville will achieve a civilized level of existence in about a thousand years. If Wal-Mart's national "model" prevails, the rest of us will one day join Bumville – sliding downward from the other end of the scale.

Sincerely,

Glen Ford, Editor and Co-Publisher

Most young people are taught that history is driven by great people called “leaders” that do great things, the effects of which trickle down to current and future generations of ordinary folks. We suppose this is the historical view that prompted the following comment from reader Wadiya Ali upon reading *BC*'s February 9, 2006 cover story, “[Failures of the Black Misleadership Class](#).”

After reading your article I have to agree there has been no one on the scene that can galvanize the Black communities of America into a unified group.

Do you have any suggestions or is it we are waiting for God to send him/her?

We humbly suggest that looking for leaders to “galvanize the black communities of America into a unified group” is a dead-end. Leaders don't make history. Mass movements make history. Mass movements throw up leaders, they throw down governments and established orders. Mass movements drag judges, politicians and the law itself in their wake. The Freedom movement of more than a generation ago was such a mass movement. We have plenty of leaders and wannabes unwilling and unable to galvanize a blessed thing. That will not change until we find the wherewithal to build another broad mass movement.

Finally, the February 9 “[Misleadership](#)” article sparked the following email from the honorable Keith Ellison, a state representative in Minneapolis MN.

I read your piece on failure of the black leadership class and I was left with a few thoughts. My first thought was that any kid who wanted to be a leader might think twice if she knew that Mr. Dixon was going to brand him as a "misleader" from the start. Your piece gives generalization a whole new meaning. I know of at least two progressive Black politicians in the Atlanta area who are progressive and doing the best they can.

Here's what else you do not acknowledge. Politicians are basically good at messaging and pulling people together. If Black politicians are not offering good ideas on how to deal with declining real wages, unemployment, etc., then why offer them something? You have a stunning diagnosis of what is wrong. When are the Black scholars, like you, going to give the Black politicians some good policy ideas? What can you offer a Black politician on poverty elimination, the explosion of Black incarceration, or epidemic of asthma among Black kids? I'd love to know.

What are your ideas for economic development? We've got 40 years of deindustrialization and globalization. Did it ever occur to you that the market forces that, say, Detroit was up against might be a little more than a mayor could handle? We live in a time in which Governors beg and promise corporations all kinds of things to locate in their state, not leave their state, or do more in their state, etc. Tax bases are being bartered away. We live in the age of Wal-Mart. And yet you mercilessly attack all black people who offer some leadership because some have made decisions as bad as their white counterparts.

Keith Ellison

BC hopes that a young person reading our Misleadership article will be reintroduced to the idea that black elected officials ought to serve the interests of their human constituents rather than those of greedy real estate speculators and big campaign contributors.

Rather than branding anyone a "misleader from the start," the article gave specific examples of misleadership behavior citing examples from Atlanta's thirty-year string of African American mayors. Breaking promises to city workers and responding to strike threats with mass firings under the reign of Maynard Jackson. Spatial deconcentration and gentrification for the Olympics under Andy Young and a third Jackson term. More of the same and water privatization under Bill Campbell, and the BeltLine under Shirley Franklin. There are those whose duty seems to consist of heaping uncritical praise on black politicians, black business people, black celebrities, anyone black who has "made it." That's not what **BC** does. We are about evaluating black elected officials on their performance, and whether that performance makes life better for their constituents. By this yardstick, there are indeed a lot of misleaders.

BC is careful not to be all things to all people. But we have and we do offer advice to black policy makers.

Anyone seeking some of our policy advice on mass incarceration, for instance might look to two articles from the summer of 2005, "[It's Time To Build a Mass Movement](#)" and "[Mass Incarceration: A Political Abomination](#)." The first article points out many of the defining characteristics of mass movements. The second states our belief that the issue of mass incarceration is, in the African American community, the organizing opportunity of this generation, and suggests a strategy for placing the issue of America's unjust and illegitimate policy of mass incarceration on the center stage as a political issue. A third article from last summer, titled [Ten Worst Places to be Black](#) is an example of the messaging around the issue of mass incarceration which Mr. Ellison opines that "politicians" are really good at, which encourages people to think the issue of mass imprisonment in new ways.

BC has also offered solid and sound advice on what urban economic development might look like if it was to benefit the people actually living in the cities now, as opposed to the economic development model currently in favor, which consists of moving poorer people off the land and richer ones in, and giving well-connected developers giant subsidies and tax breaks to make it happen. The five part series, “Wanted: A Plan For the Cities to Save Themselves” ran in **BC** issues throughout 2003 and 2004.

Far from being all problem statement and no solution, the series highlighted the efforts of community groups and others engaged in exemplary and pioneering work in the field of community economic development.

BC also showcased the very useful work of Greg Leroy of Good Jobs First, reprinting the abridged introduction to his book The Great American Jobs Scam in our September 15, 2005 edition. In this seminal work, Mr. Leroy outlines a decades-long campaign on the part of corporate America that has all but abolished the corporate income tax, which allows companies that operate in multiple states to not report income in any of them, and much more. His book reveals an entire industry devoted to producing fraudulent and misleading job creation and economic growth forecasts in order to wring unjustified subsidies out of local and state governments. We recommend it most highly to politicians and to ordinary citizens trying to get a grip on what “economic development” is.

Far from meekly acquiescing to life in “the age of Wal-Mart-Mart,” as Rep. Ellison puts it, Greg Leroy was the first to put an accurate figure on how much government subsidies Wal-Mart gets.

An astute and careful **BC** reader will have no trouble picking out lots of specific advice on public policy. Living wage legislation to boost family income? Anti-usury laws to keep more families out of bankruptcy? Single payer health care? Shrinking the crime control and prison industry that has disproportionately victimized our communities? We can only conclude that Rep. Ellison is new to **BC**, and has not yet familiarized himself with some of our useful offerings. We welcome the opportunity to engage him and other progressive black elected officials in discussions about how to address the urgent matters that affect our people.

BC welcomes dialogue with all its esteemed readers. We try to answer most of our email, and we print some of it in this space each week. Send us your best, and we promise to keep sending you ours.

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