

**The
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Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
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Bruce's Beat
Cory Booker: Pimp My City!
NAFTA: Run to the border!
McKinney: Don't profile me!
Email from readers
by BC Editor Bruce Dixon

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Life, the song tells us, is hard out here for a pimp. And why shouldn't it be? The pimp sells something of great value that's not even his. By that definition, Newark mayoral candidate Cory Booker, poised to hand over the city's schools and the remnants of its public sector over to privatizers and the right wing social engineers of the Manhattan Institute, is one pimp to watch.

Last week **BC** Senior Commentator Margaret Kimberley incisively skewered Booker along with incumbent Mayor Sharpe James, whose late withdrawal from the race may have paved the way to a Booker victory. This week, **BC** readers weigh in:

Carl Fletcher heard Booker on the radio and writes us:

Ms. Kimberley,

I really appreciated this article. Last month Booker was on Air America's Rachel Maddow Show and WNYC's Brian Lehrer Show. The obsequiousness of the so-called interviews was sickening. The liberal establishment has its set of favorites: Barack Obama, Arthur Davis I've never heard Terry Gross mention let alone interview Charlie Rangel, Maxine Waters and other leaders of the CBC. It's as though they've decided the only black people that they like are the pseudo intellectuals who write books about the end of race. Democratic and

Republican leadership both want to de-emphasize race so they can go after the treasured suburban upscale white male and females. Howard Dean may be an exception. I wonder if Barack Obama will be seduced by the establishment and begin to play it's game. The signs are ominous.



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The Howard Dean who ran for president in 2004, and who was independent of most of the Democratic party's corporate funders was a very different man from the Howard Dean of today. Party leaders are not chosen for their big or original ideas or for their grand and inspiring visions of how society ought to work. They are fundraisers. Appointing Dean the chief fundraiser of the Democratic party seems in retrospect to have been a brilliantly effective means of silencing his voice, and those of his original supporters, the Democratic party's base voters, who resolutely oppose the war and favor universal health care, impeachment of the president, and other stands which are anathema to corporate media and corporate contributors.

Nowadays Job One for Dr. Dean is to keep the contributions, overwhelmingly from wealthy individuals and corporations, flowing. As public financing for campaigns is off the table, and as long as Americans are legally restricted to a two-party system with no alternatives to the left of Democrats, the Democratic base voters – and that means black voters – will be mere passengers on the bus driven by the party's contributors and their lobbyists.

We once had high hopes for Senator Obama too. But that was a while ago. The Obama of today seems to value his friendship with party financiers like Warren Buffet more than he does the principles and aspirations of the Democratic party's base voters who launched his political career.

As for softball questions, everybody who's "media" is not a journalist. The job of journalism is to monitor the centers of power and inform the public. On the individual level, too many media personalities and self-described journalists would rather be friends of power than speak truth to it. And on the institutional level the media and human resources directed to original news gathering are shrinking, according to the annual State of the Media report from Columbia University's center for Excellence in Journalism. It's no surprise therefore, that the few big "media personalities" with microphones are asking the same few official spokespeople the same lame questions.

An optimistic **BC** reader and frequent correspondent J. Hutton writes:

Ms. Kimberley:

Cory Booker does not have an insurmountable lead; no lead is insurmountable. Ronald Rice should have seen the handwriting on the wall. I am not at all surprised at James' actions. He doesn't want any subordinates taking over after himself, doing better, thus making him look bad.

Booker "defines" public education as the use of public funds, etc., etc. This is crap! Public education is not as Booker defined it. Yet, who challenged him? I guarantee you that if you attack Booker strongly, unrelentingly, Booker will fade.

It's indeed late in Newark, but we think Mr. Hutton is on to something. We hope Ron Rice and the forces allied with him can define the issues and define Booker in a way that will keep George F. Will and the Manhattan Institute from naming black Newark's next mayor, or providing Booker with a stepping stone to

higher office. Time will tell. There just isn't that much time left.

While Corey Booker attempts to pimp a city's public sector, another ambitious member of the black political class chose to pimp the reputation of his own family – his own grandmother. It's not as though *BC* didn't get reader email defending the execrable congressman from Memphis, Harold Ford, Jr. It's just that so little of it was coherent or printable. Without radically changing the character of what was written, the following misguided comment by reader Rob Harris Jr. was the only email of its kind we could print.

Just when I thought I had finally found an objective source of information of interest to me and my community, instead I now find a nuclear-powered spin machine for the GOP. What a waste.

The notion that honest criticism of black political figures somehow helps Republicans betrays a deep bankruptcy of principle. If we can't criticize leaders and pretenders to leadership we are all passengers on a bus to nowhere.

When a movie wins the academy award for "best picture" that's big stuff, big business and big culture. In *BC*'s case, it was big enough to follow Derik Smith's March 16 Guest Commentary, "Investigating the Crash Scene" with a March 23 ThinkPiece, by Robert Jensen and Robert Wosnitzer, "Crash and the Self-Indulgence of White America." The movie's publicists and many critics have advanced the claim that "Crash" tells us something about race "as it's lived in America" that we knew all the time, but have not dared acknowledge. The trouble is, what "Crash" tells us isn't true, and excuses white privilege and white supremacy.



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Joseph Anderson of Berkeley CA wrote us this note, to pass on to the authors:

Dear Professors Jensen & Wosnitzer,

It is amazing, though understandable how white people want to avoid racism and white-supremacy as a system of power. Racism is not merely just a matter of individual personal sentiment that "we all have." That position helps whites to evade moral responsibility to eliminate a structure that they happily, if unfairly, benefit from. It's probably beyond any white American movie-makers to involve the questions of class and white privilege analysis in a movie.

Yet, so many people just "loved" this movie.

Culture is the lens through which humans view each other and the world. Expecting corporate culture to challenge, or even to illuminate corporate rule is really asking quite a lot. Sometimes rogue elements of authentically empowering culture do slip through the corporate filters. That, Chuck D explained in a recent interview with Free Mix Radio's Dr. Jared Ball, is how Public Enemy initially slipped past the gatekeepers and into the spotlight. But it doesn't happen often.

"Crash" reached the mass market, and received the "best picture" award not because it disagreed in any fundamental way with the white establishment take on "how race is lived in America" but because it reassured white America that racism was about individuals, not institutions, and that blacks and Asians and everybody else was probably just as "racist" as they were.

Restricting the definition of racism to the actions and attitudes of individuals, and denying the existence of institutional racism is a major project of conservative "thought" in America. If racism is either bad manners or just an individual thing that happens inside people's heads, government can do nothing about it because of course government has no business regulating manners or poking around inside anyone's head.

Reader Bennie Barton wrote *BC* to offer suggestions on African Americans and the immigration issue:

First off, thank you for giving this discussion the focus that it deserves. I whole heartedly agreed with everything in the article. Our collaboration with our Latino kinsmen is no more important than it is right now at this juncture in history. All of our struggles are related. As Dr. King said, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere."

I really believe that the anti-immigrant rhetoric we hear from some African Americans is the result of the lack of understanding of too many of our people in regards to understanding the global nature and scope of our oppression. What I believe we need right now is an education movement. Not education in the sense of going to school, but education in the sense of establishing study groups nationwide where we seek to develop a comprehensive understanding and analysis of our plight here and in the Diaspora and the various other related issues such as feminism, globalization, etc.

As we point out elsewhere in this issue, the immigration issue, for African Americans is about labor market competition, and the labor market is a global one. What happens here profoundly affects people over the horizon, and soon afterward, what they do over the horizon will have repercussions in your neighborhood. Those who imagine we can understand the labor market crises affecting black America without comprehending the US role in depressing the labor markets of countries whose citizens are now forced to come here to find work to keep their families alive are being fooled or are fooling themselves.



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Undocumented immigrants in the US, at least 60% of whom are Mexican, are children of NAFTA. The US business class, spearheaded by the Republican party but massively aided by Democratic President and former DLC head Bill Clinton passed NAFTA into law over the objections of most congressional Democrats in 1993. NAFTA spent US taxpayers' money to aid and encourage businesses to relocate their investments first to Mexico, then to wherever on the planet wages were driven lowest that year. NAFTA allowed taxpayer-subsidized US agribusiness companies to devour what used to be the market for locally produced agricultural products in Mexico. It drove farmers in Mexico and elsewhere off the land into the cities, and subverted the food sovereignty of those nations. The latest economic and political repercussions of NAFTA are immigrant workers here in the US. The chain of causality isn't hard to follow, but we won't get any help from the mainstream media or from many of our so-called leaders.

Finally, by now *BC* readers will have heard that last week Georgia's Cynthia McKinney was manhandled by a Capitol Hill police officer at a security checkpoint when hurrying to a floor vote. Amazingly, with only 14 black women in Congress, it seems that the Capitol Police were unable to remember McKinney's face. The whole incident reeks of racial profiling. Farfetched? The following Monday on the Wolf Blitzer show, McKinney related the story of a lesser known, but related incident.

During the Atlanta funeral of Coretta Scott King, when she lay in state under the golden dome of the Georgia state capitol, in McKinney's words "...the Georgia legislative black caucus was not allowed into the building to form a part of the procession. Why? the security at the Georgia capitol did not recognize them as duly elected members..."

On April 4th Democracy Now Atlanta Democratic state representative "Able Mabel" Thomas confirms McKinney's story.

For us [Georgia's black legislators] to have to not be allowed to go on what we call the second floor, which is where the rotunda is in the state Capitol, and basically be told that we had to wait upstairs, which is on the third floor where our chamber is, we think it was just really – it was just unheard of that we would be treated that way.

And basically what we did as legislators is we followed the protocol, because it was a sacred ceremony and we did not want to have the news coverage be about us, because we knew the news coverage was about the passing of a gentle and a strong warrior for our people. And so we know that, not only just in Washington, D.C., but in Georgia and probably throughout this nation, those persons, black elected officials, have not been treated with the type of dignity that they have been given by our constituents when they vote for us. But we have sort of had to bear it and just go along and get along, because we are trying to not be the news story. We're trying to impact our communities.

It seems that racial profiling impacts our communities every day, whether we are teenagers walking down a street, or properly suited and booted members of Congress or state legislatures.

We welcome the comments of **BC** readers. We try to answer all our email, and sometimes succeed. We print some of it in this column weekly. Send us your best, or the rest at bruce.dixon@blackcommentator.com.