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C o M M e n t a t o r**  
Commentary, analysis and investigations  
on issues affecting African Americans  
[www.blackcommentator.com](http://www.blackcommentator.com)

April 6, 2006  
Issue 178  
4th Anniversary Issue

Cover Story  
Portrait of a Negro Corporate Politician  
Kasim Reed: Lawyer for the Rich and Racist  
by BC Editor Bruce Dixon

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Atlanta corporate attorney and Democratic Georgia state senator Kasim Reed was deeply distressed at our March 13 **BC** cover story "[Blacks and Browns: The Need to Make Common Cause.](#)" We know because he told us so. **BC** spelled out the tale of Reed's shameful attempt to ape the demagogic meanness of Republicans on the immigration issue. In a bill that had no chance of passage, Reed proposed, among other things, to lock up anyone who applied for a job in Georgia with a fake ID for five years. With no detectable irony in his voice, Reed assured **BC** in a phone conversation that he was acting to "protect the jobs and living standards" of black families in Georgia.



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Let's be clear. Kasim Reed is no champion of working people in Georgia or anyplace else. Senator Reed is a corporate attorney, a partner in the transnational firm of Holland & Knight with offices in Palm Beach, Tel Aviv, metro DC, Atlanta, Beijing, and elsewhere. Holland & Knight is heavily involved in union busting, or as legal firms prefer to call it, "union avoidance" – advising employers how best to intimidate, coerce and selectively fire employees, how to bend, skirt and occasionally break the law to prevent formation of labor unions and break existing ones. The firm is a major anti-environmental player on the national stage, representing the chemical industry on Capitol Hill. It maintains deep connections with the Republican party, and its partners advise Republican state legislators on how best to disenfranchise black voters via the redistricting process in Georgia and other states.

We asked Reed about the incongruity between posing as an advocate of the rights of working families and the union busting practices of his law firm. Amazingly, the man told us that he couldn't be responsible for what all 13,000 lawyers at the firm actually did, and that he should be judged on his own record. Supposing for the moment that this is an acceptable answer, his bio page on the company web site tells us all we need to know about that record.

"M. Kasim Reed represents employers in employment law matters, including sex, age and disability discrimination, civil rights litigation, and contract-related disputes... He has extensive experience representing employers before various state and federal courts, as well as before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other federal and state administrative agencies."

There it is. The black state senator who rails against brown immigrants for "taking black jobs" practices employment discrimination law – for employers – and civil rights law for the corporate violators of civil rights. With that bit of context firmly established, we here reprint Reed's email to us:

To the Publishers:

The **BC** article was factually incorrect on several counts and failed to properly discuss my position on illegal immigration in Georgia. I am an unabashed supporter of legal immigration and legal immigrants in our country. After all, our country is a nation of immigrants. Our state benefits greatly from the contributions of immigrants in every way possible. I have never, and will never, oppose the right of someone who seeks to enter our county under the laws established by our citizens.

After studying this issue in the legislature, we concluded that we could not simply do nothing about the illegal immigration problem in Georgia because it hurts working people and the federal government has failed to act. The bill I authored punishes individuals who present fraudulent documents to employers by making this offense a misdemeanor for the first offense and a felony on the second offense. This was not properly explained by Mr. Dixon.

Mr. Dixon fails to mention that the legislation seeks to establish fines in the amount of \$12,800 per employee against employers who violate the statute. The Pew Hispanic Center recently released a study showing that you can not address the problem of illegal immigration without addressing the employer side of the issue. My bill did that.

Dixon also asserted that I was a member of the Democratic Leadership Council. While I respect that organization and the work it does on a variety of issues, I am not a member. A simple fact check or telephone call to me would have revealed that. Further, the "current Republican leader for the Georgia State Senate" is not a "former Democrat."

Unfortunately Black Commentator has produced a very poor and unprofessional piece of journalism without the normal fact checking that most credible journalistic organizations engage in.

Mr. Dixon completely ignores Republican measures on the immigration issue which Democrats worked vigorously to defeat. I also notice a consistent pattern in his writing of denigrating Democrats, while ignoring Republican's role in leading on issues which are damaging to our community. Increasingly, the privilege of public service is tarnished by people like Mr. Dixon who too often ignore basic facts, misconstrue motives and take ill informed cheap shots at those who are working to find solutions to complex problems which

impact each of us. Nonetheless, I am going to do my job on the front lines of the struggle in the Georgia State Senate where this effort continues every day.

Sincerely,

M. Kasim Reed

The only factual error in our **BC** cover story was that the Republican leader of the Georgia senate in 2002 wasn't a former Democrat. We never said Reed was a DLC member. We did call him a "DLC Democrat" because the DLC claimed him as "New Democrat of the Week" on their website. That's good enough. As for **BC** ignoring the damage Republicans do, we slammed Reed precisely for following the Republican lead on criminalizing immigration. And we didn't bore our readers with the employer sanctions aspect of Reed's bill because they are empty threats. Employer sanctions have been on the books since the 1980s. **BC** wasn't the only publication not to take Reed's bill any more seriously than he did.

"...Reed had no hope of passing his bill," noted Atlanta's Creative Loafing newspaper. "... the plan was for it to be rejected by the GOP so Democrats wouldn't look soft on illegal immigration in the fall elections."

In the real world, proposals to criminalize immigration or to lock up folks who apply for a job with a false ID are demagogic. Nobody is going to round up, imprison and deport millions of people back to their countries of origin. They may propose it to provoke divisions and get votes, but it's just not going to happen.

The antics of senator Reed aside, immigration is an issue African Americans need to understand and to take seriously. The presence of millions of undocumented immigrants with no right to demand fair treatment gives the kind of greedy and/or racist employers whom Kasim Reed represents a choice. They can hire African Americans who are the most likely of all workers to join unions and stand up for themselves. Or they can hire the undocumented who dare not speak up for fear of jail or deportation. Needless to say, this is a bad bargain for immigrants and a worse one for African Americans.



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For black America, the immigration issue is all about labor market competition. So-called legal "guest worker" programs solve the labor market problem in favor of employers, by allowing an employer to directly "pull the trigger" and initiate deportation proceedings against immigrant workers who step out of line. Thus "guest worker" programs preserve the two-tier labor market that employers dearly love. Solving the labor market problem in favor of black America would require a level playing field where discrimination of all kinds is outlawed and everyone has the right to organize and join unions, to bargain collectively and to strike. Everybody.

Back in **BC**'s August 22, 2002, issue we printed a passage from black South Carolina Representative Jim Clyburn in which he told how, back in the early 1970s, as an aide to his state's governor, he ran across an economic development memo that was certainly not meant for his eyes:

"The memorandum had been written by an economic development consultant and listed counties to be avoided when recruiting industry to the state. These counties were all rural and all predominantly black. The theory was that South Carolina, a right to work state, could see the proliferation of labor unions if industries located in these counties because African Americans were deemed to be 'joiners.' At the time I didn't understand the significance of

what I had seen. Today I do."



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We do too. Studies indicate that African American women are the most likely to organize and join unions, followed by African American men. Next most likely are Latino women, followed by Latino men, and finally white women followed by the least likely "joiners" of all – white men. Kasim Reed and his clients know this very well. One of the chief objectives of America's political class then, is to sow every possible obstacle in the path of these groups of likely joiners, blacks and browns, working together. For corporate America, nobody could make a better speechchucker against the "brown menace" than a black politician. Kasim Reed is just doing his job for his clients.

Finally, in his letter, Reed claims that he took up the immigration issue because the federal government "failed to act." Leaving aside the principle that he failed to learn at Howard University Law School – that a state can no more have its own immigration policy than print its own currency or float its own navy – there are lots of other issues the federal government has failed to act on where states could conceivably take the progressive lead.

**BC** asked a local pastor, Rev. Timothy McDonald of Atlanta's First Iconium Baptist Church, what issues he would suggest Reed tackle, if it was about acting where the federal government failed:

"Mandatory sentencing – Georgia's two strikes laws. We could show the nation something there. We could reduce the number of our children, our nieces and nephews, our brothers and our sisters behind those walls. That would be progressive. That would be something. That would be leadership."

We are afraid that if the thin-skinned senator and corporate attorney from Atlanta found **BC**'s first mention of him displeasing, he won't like this issue any better. **BC** is not Black Enterprise, or Ebony magazine, or BET's "How I'm Livin'." Unlike these kinds of "black oriented media" the purpose of real journalism is not to market lifestyles and products. It's not to showcase the homes, careers and possessions of African Americans who have "made it." The press is the only profession with its own constitutional amendment so that it can fearlessly speak truth to power. The next time Kasim Reed wants some favorable press he should call up BET. Maybe they'll feature his place on the next "How I'm Livin'."

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