

The BLACK C o m m e n t a t o r

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social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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"Y'all is messing up."

By Wilson Riles

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator

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I was able to replay the discussion between Carl Dix and Cornel West. It took place on July 14 in New York City before an audience of about 800. I also listened to Amy Goodman's interview of the two of them on *Democracy NOW!* For me the content of the discussion was **under**whelming. I found it un-remarkable. The title of the event that evening was "*The Ascendancy of Obama... and the Continued Need for Resistance and Liberation*". I do not know if it was the format or the participants but this event did not live up to its potential for helping to solidify and advance the movement for justice. There was no exchange.

Cornel – who I appreciate very much from his previous works – was entertaining but mostly shallow and defensive. On his good side he hinted at the need for alliances for resistance; he, however, did not spell this out in terms of the meaning and structure of the needed alliances and the critical importance of this to the success of resistance actions. He also made a brief reference to cultural, artistic contributions to the movement by saying that he had gone to a Prince, John Mellencamp, and Bob Dylan musical concert that same evening noting their Blues sensibilities and communion with the poor and working class; the critical importance of this form of communications to reach all groups was left unsaid.

Dr. West recognized the symbolic power of the new President's black skin and rightly declared that it was not enough; although he honored the euphoria that some folks on the left **felt** about Obama's election, he did not adequately warn against being misled by those feelings. There is a long history in justice movements of 'firsts' and main stream societal celebrities that mainly enhanced the Western Cultural myth of individualism and furthered introspective and spiritual laziness. (This dynamic is also

deeply embedded in the functioning of Carl Dix's Revolutionary Communist Party and its reverence for the individual of Chairman Bob Avakian.)

Cornel must be given some credit for mentioning that we are "all cracked vessels" and mentioning the phenomena of HNICs (Head Negroes in Charge); but he did not break this down enough so that an unfamiliar audience would understand. In the interview with Amy Goodman, the Professor spoke of "the Obama administration [being] obsessed with the wrong Lincoln." There he spoke of the impact of the abolitionist movement on Lincoln as represented by Frederick Douglas, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Wendell Phillips, and Charles Sumner. Obama has closed off almost all access to him by those in the justice movement. Obama's lesson from Lincoln is that he reached 'across the aisle' to include some of his individual opponents in his cabinet; Barack's ability to so easily take Single Payer off the table is testament to continued deafness to the left even when it is in the majority. Cornel West's comments on this regard are too brief.

Instead Dr. West talks about his justification for supporting Obama as a means to "bring Reaganism to a close." This is a totally nebulous, unexamined assertion or afterthought that is highly suspect as a real achievement of the Obama election. First of all, Cornel stays within the Western Cultural myth of individualism by equating conservatism with the individual person of Reagan; then he talks as if Obama's election vanquished conservatism as if we are now living in a post-conservative Obama era. We are no more living in a post-conservative age than we are living in a post-racial age. Western Cultural conservative myths and racial myths are buried too deeply in us as individuals, in the language, in our conceptualizations, and in our institutions, even those organizations we might believe to be radically left leaning. Despite Professor West concluding with a call that we all take up resistance as a way of life, I was very disappointed.

Carl Dix was very good at describing the problem but little else. Carl dealt with the 'blaming the victim' phenomenon that was exhibited by Bill Cosby and by Obama in his "fathers' day speeches." Here Dix, West, Cosby, Obama, and many others fail to escape the tangled Western myths of individualism, either/or paradigms, and Western cultural-scientism-authoritarian chauvinism. Through multiple intense acts of love and caring, black parents and leaders naturally attempt to guide the ignorant toward acts and behaviors that it is hoped will lead to less poverty and reduced direct individual oppression. In doing this, examples are sought among those of us that have achieved some modicum of 'success' by adapting our language, our dress, and by 'toning down' our behaviors to mimic the way the oppressor acts - sometimes. But rather than just say this is a model for survival, all too often existing behaviors are 'put down' and denigrated as if these behaviors are the reason that poor black folks are oppressed. We have here a drastic imbalance in the perception of the locus of control; we ought to know better because there are inexhaustible examples of 'proper acting' black folks facing discrimination. It is right to tell someone to 'duck' but insane to think that they get hit because they don't duck; they get hit because of the person making the toss. There is a both/and reality here that all too often Western Cultural thinkers are blind to. No such analysis was presented other than name calling.

Carl Dix also was provocatively inaccurate in his description of Obama's position on Africa for the same reasons; I never heard Obama tell Africa that they should forget about slavery as Carl stated. I saw Obama spend time touring the holding pens of Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, rather. Obama's fault was in not giving due recognition to the historical, capitalistic, Cold War, systemic reasons for mismanagement of African governments. Obama is not wrong to point out this mismanagement. In the same sense, Bob Avakian and the RCP is at fault in their criticism of religion and religious

people; they fail to give due recognition to the twisting of Christian religion by Roman Emperor Constantine and subsequent shaping by imperialism throughout history. Imperialism infected nearly all human social institutions from the individual, to the family, all the way up. Let us not fail to make distinctions between a people's or an institution's goodness or humanity and the twisting that came about because of history and culture. What is good for the goose is also good for the gander. Dix closed with a poem from Oscar Brown Jr. that graphically described the problem, only.

Cornel West and Carl Dix simply stipulated their differences; if they had engaged these differences, we might have had an interesting and helpful discussion. When Amy Goodman asked Cornel where he disagreed with Dix, Cornel said that he was "a free Jesus-loving black man, and (Dix), my dear secular, atheistic, revolutionary communist comrade...we disagree probably on what it means to engage in revolutionary transformation of a capitalist society." When Amy asked Dix what it means to be a revolutionary communist, he described the need to recognize the lethal, exploitive actions of capitalism. Ok, many of us are there. Dix then talked about the need "to stop cold the system of capitalism and imperialism...through revolution, and **put** power into the hands of the people." This is where the RCP loses me. If one is **putting** power into the hands of the people than it is not the people who have the power; it is the **putter** who controls the power. I say "no thanks" to creating a small vanguard or "core" with power that has been - somehow - snatched from the present small oligarchic elite.

I would have been much more excited by a discussion between Cornel West and Carl Dix on their differences and how to pull off the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society. On the left we are clear about what we are against. All too often we fail to articulate what we are for and how to get there. That is why when we work together, win, lose, or draw our efforts are unsustainable. Too bad for us this talking-pass-one-another encounter was just another example of a lost opportunity.

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