Our month

Afro-American History Month comes at a time when black Americans are being challenged to reaffirm their long-standing promise to march forward in the face of any and all odds toward the day when equal opportunity becomes a reality.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson
Father of Black History

Much has changed since Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1926 started the observance as Negro History Week. But it has not outlived its usefulness and is not observed merely to carry on a tradition.

We still are troubled by the continued failure of historians and the chronicilers of current events to properly record the role of black Americans. They still either ignore or misrepresent the contributions we make.

Whatever else comes from the observance of Afro-American History Month this February, it should serve to inspire our people to rededicate themselves to the noble proposition of demanding that past and present history presents our role in a more honest light.

If we strive to influence the selection of history books in classrooms and media treatment of our problems and progress, future history will be more inclusive and more representative. Implicit in demanding that history accurately portray a people's role is to be convinced that fair treatment of their contributions and rights will add to their acceptance as first-class citizens. Woodson recognized this and acted accordingly. Fortified by the annual observance he started, our task is to carry the mission forward.

Extend voting act

It is unthinkable that the Voting Rights Act should not be extended before it expires in August 1982.

Minority participation in the election process of the nation has improved dramatically since it was been in effect.

Although none of them will admit it, that is the reason for the strong opposition developing to extension of the legislation.

Among the hard-nosed opponents are South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, the conservative Republican who heads the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Rep. M. Caldwell Butler, the Virginia Republican. Their arguments are typical. Thurmond claims the law should cover all states and Butler insists it already has corrected the evils it set out to correct in 1964.

Neither claim holds water.

Liberal Democratic Rep. Don Edwards of California is on target when he says "There's still discrimination in many parts of this country."

The law now covers all of nine states and parts of 13 others. It bans literacy tests. Changes in the election process in covered jurisdictions must be approved either by the Justice Department or a federal court in Washington, D.C.

Blacks still are under-represented in many areas and hold relatively few elective offices. But tremendous progress has been made in voter registration and in elective positions because of the Voting Rights Act.

American Civil Liberties Union official Laughlin McDonald says abolishing the act "would be disaster for blacks in the South."

He's right. There are many areas of the South where vestiges of the old dual system linger. Large numbers of families still face pressures for involving themselves in politics, school desegregation and affirmative action. The Ku Klux Klan is riding high again, helping stir hate in the area.

Rep. Edwards is wise to move early to get congressional action on this important legislation.

Taking away food

Do you have children who get free school lunches? Or do you receive public assistance for winter heating bills?

If so, get prepared. A proposal now being considered by the Reagan administration would certainly reduce the amount of food stamp aid you receive.

In addition, a full two million persons now getting such food stamp aid would be automatically "lopped off" the rolls. Eliminated is the word.

And this doesn't include Puerto Rico, where a gigantic $2 billion will be cut out of the program.

No matter if people are hungry. Nor if the poor don't really benefit from such invisible and long-range "savings" as tax reductions. Apparently none of this concerns President Reagan's budget director, who feels that there is nothing wrong with military expenditures going up while food benefits go down.

Under the new plan (yet to be approved), the poor who attempt to hold down a job would also be penalized, since as their income comes in, they would receive a larger reduction of food stamp aid based on every additional dollar they earn.

The equivalents of the cost of free lunches and emergency heating aid would also be counted as real income under the new plan.

In other words, what the government continues to give with one hand (lunches or fuel) it will take back with the other (in terms of food). If this isn't the most ridiculous — and meanest — form of governance, it is hard to say what is.

Fortunately, the budgetary item of food stamps will be attached to a general farm bill. Which means that some compromises must be ordered.

Our word to concerned senators and representatives is: Refuse to pass the agricultural bill unless a better food-stamp-aid proposal can be invented.

S. Africa bans black journalists

To comprehend how racially vicious and degrading South Africa is, repeated banning of publications designed for black readership is meant to be requires no further knowledge than the fact that the white publishers who actually print the papers aren't put out of business.

New victims of the government ban are the daily Post Transvaal and the Sunday Post, sister publications edited for blacks but owned by the Argus Newspaper Group, a white company.

The Argus Group will now start upgrading a small advertising weekly, Soweton, into a daily. Its staff will be composed mostly of blacks who worked on the banned papers.

But two key staffers won't be available. The Post's political correspondent Phil Mtimkulu and labor correspondent Joe Thloloe, recently elected president and vice president of the Media Workers Association, were hit with "banning orders." They succeeded banned officials.

That means they can't leave their homes at all on weekends and holidays and can't go out between dusk and dawn during the week. They can't visit schools, factories or newspaper offices and only their parents and doctor may visit them.

That's how life is for the black majority in South Africa, an officially racist nation that has American conservatives lobbying for it at the highest levels in our own government.

Oblivious to world criticism, the apartheid government in South Africa hopes that by banning the largest papers circulated for blacks, it will keep the majority from communicating certain facts and views.

It likewise expects that its terror-tactics will strike fear in the hearts of other publishers.

More likely blacks across the nation will take the bannings as new slaps in the face, which is what they are.

Were it true that the banned papers promoted revolution, activism and far-left radicalism, as charged by the government, to ban them and leave their white owners untouched must be viewed as another racial slap in the face for blacks.

In addition to showing white disdain for black South Africans, the government undercuts positive steps it takes by resorting to such actions.

South Africa's misguided officials are doing far more to encourage revolution and radicalism than did the banned papers.

Reagan plan: Starve the poor, stuff the military

LETTERS TO THE AFRO:

Nothing but a 'white folks' ball'

WASHINGTON

The inaugural festivities surrounding the installation of a new president of the United States have left me bewildered and saddened.

Compared to the last two inaugurations, fewer blacks were visible or participants. (Only two blacks, a cabinet appointee and his wife, were on the reviewing stands, for instance).

Further it seems somewhat ironic that conservatives, who lambast excessive federal spending and call for a "balanced budget," see nothing inconsistent in spending more than $9 million for a mere oath-of-office rituals at the same time. (Never before in American history has an inauguration cost so much).

One is tempted to ask, "Wouldn't that amount of money feed a lot of poor people?" But I fear I might get an answer similar to the one Nancy Reagan gave critics of her $7,000 dress and coat. (She said that if the poor couldn't afford a coat like hers, let them come without one).

If all that were not enough, we were shocked to see noted black actor Ben Vereen doing an inaugural step-and-dance routine that would have pleased any old Confederate.

Such "Steppin' Fetchit" vaudeville acts belong to another era and should have been left there. They were a disgrace to black people in general and, hopefully, even to the sensibilities of many, many whites.

What is worse is the fact that so few blacks were otherwise involved at all in the pre-inaugural gala. It was almost as if the black role had once again been diminished to that of entertaining whites with shallow bombast and stereotype-enforcing toomfoolery.

Vereen's act represented neither art nor humor. It harked from the days when blacks-in-white-face had to "sport for the master" in order to survive. It was entertainment on a level lower than burlesque.

If black entertainers and musicians and artists — and all of us — don't rise up and condemn such race-baiting antics, we shall all be the worse for it.

Unfortunately this inauguration was a "white folks' ball" replete with plantation memories in more ways than one.

JAMES T. JACKSON

Vereen took the cake

PHILADELPHIA

I thought Sammy Davis Jr. was sickening enough with his public displays of his love for conservatives during the Nixon administration — but Ben Vereen took the cake with his white-lipped, black-faced Uncle Tom act before President and Mrs. Reagan.

Charley Pride wasn't far behind Vereen when bowed and grunted to "Miss Nancy," as he called Mrs. Reagan.

This once again proves the old adage that more things change, the more they stay the same.

Ben Vereen is a disgrace. I'm outraged. As far as I am concerned, Vereen is a modern - day combination of Uncle Tom and "Chicken George," with no justification to be such.

ALEXANDER PETERSON

No cheers for the hostages (spies)

MEMPHIS

I watched with amazement as scores of black people across the country expressed their sentiments for the return of the 52 American so-called hostages (spies).

How stupid can we be! People of the oppressed countries around the world must look at us and shake their heads.

Do you realize that there are 30 million black people who are "mental hostages" in America? Now is the time to unlock our minds so as to recognize the oppressor and the oppressed.

None of these so-called hostages (spies) has revealed their designated purpose for being in Iran. This fact should at least be made public so as not to distort untruths. The truth is that the so-called hostages (spies) ultimate vendetta can be classified as a sensitive intelligence mission in Iran in collaboration with the Shah's secret police — savak!

Should we as black people calously ignore the serious thorns which pierce our very flesh? The horrors of yesterday, today and tomorrow are upon us here in America. Increasing unemployment; injustice and unequal justice in American courts; the continuous brutal murders of innocent black children with no one yet brought to justice; disenchantment (with an oppressive system as was evident in Miami, Greensboro, Memphis, Chattanooga and Wrightsville.

The resurgence and military preparedness of the Ku Klux Klan; the continuous attacks upon black people in New York; cutoff of essential services and threats of cutoffs, and the prediction of a race war by some formenting of such a catastrophe by right-wing forces rampant throughout America.

The hostages (spies) claim that they were mistreated in Iran. I say what goes around comes around. What about the many years that black people have been intimidated, brutalized and humiliated in this country for which they will go to war and give their very lives?

One thing is certain — when 51 of the so-called hostages arrive here and put their feet on American soil, they will immediately be free people, unlike us black people who are literally "free slaves." Think about it!

YUSEF I. EL AZIZ RAHMAN

'Sob Sister'

By Ruth Jenkins

No-sense Census

In retrospect:

April Fool's Day was as good a day as any to serve as Census Day. There was many a joke in the questionnaire.

As for instance, the race question. Didja notice that we were the only ones with two choices — "Black or Negro?"

But the real chuckle choice came in identifying the "Person in Column 2" if he-she was not a kinship relation.

You could cover a multitude of sins in deciding whether this person (who either pays or shares the rent) should be recorded as a roomer, boarder, partner, roommate (smile and wink); or a paid employee. Is that what the dictionary calls a gigolo?

The Census Bureau's example sheet was chicken. It steered clear of this sensitive situation by sticking within the blood relation category.

But the example sheet struck out boldly against Patricia Doe, the three-month-old make-believe daughter of Arthur and Frances Doe, the census sheet's make-believe family.

About Baby Patricia, the filled-in dots told all and sundry that this infant had never married, had not attended any school or college since February, and as a matter of fact had never attended school at all. For shame!

Later, the census sheet displayed its own intellect.

Asking for information about how many babies a woman may have had, the guide sheet instructed: "Do not count her stepchildren or children she has adopted." Brilliant!

The guide sheet was really helpful with most of the issues. But it should have pointed out that "are-you-kidding?" was not the proper answer in our neighborhood to the question "Is your home on a property of ten or more acres?"

Also unacceptable were such comments as "What public transportation?", "I have not the slightest idea" and "I'm not sure the divorce was legal, or even if the marriage was, for that matter."

We know why the census occurs only every ten years — it'll take that long for those 86 million misized envelopes to clear the post office.

We also know why the collected information is kept secret for 72 years. It'll take the chauvinists that long to think up an explanation about:

How come the instructions said "Count as work . . . any parttime work including paper routes (usually handled by males) and "Do not count as work . . . housework at home (usually handled by females).

The census needed lots of facts 'Bout jobs, and homes and kin. To fair-share $50 billion — Count me in, Man, count me in!

It's stupid: Classifying by race

Franklin H. Williams

The law does weird things in some countries.

In one, it can change your race in a second. In 1978 in South Africa, 152 people had their racial classification changed by government. 101 coloreds, those of mixed race, became whites; two whites became coloreds; five whites became Chinese; two whites became Indians; 10 coloreds became Indians; three coloreds became Chinese; two Chinese became coloreds; one Chinese became white; 11 Indians became coloreds; four Indians became Malays; 10 Malays became Indians.

Clarence Darrow, the great defense lawyer of the early part of this century, once showed just how ridiculous it is to attempt to classify people by race or color.

Sympathetically describing a situation familiar to blacks, he turned to a dark complexioned man and said, "I'm sure you'll understand." The man was not black but a Mediterranean white. Darrow then deliberately turned to a blue-eyed blond man and said, "No one could make such a mistake with you." But the blond was Walter White, head of the NAACP and one of the early great American black leaders.

Walter White looked whiter than most white Americans, but, he said, nothing ever convinced him that he was anything but black.

It's all so absurd and laughable if you stop and think about it. But it ain't funny in South Africa . . . the difference could mean life or death.

Child rights

Two to four thousand American children are deliberately killed by their parents or guardians every year! In New York City alone, it's estimated that one child is killed every week.

Child abuse is a disease of adults which, unless cured, is often reflected in the subsequent conduct of children. Abuses range from abandonment to death. The problem is serious and widespread.

In 1912, America created the Children's Bureau, the first government agency in the world devoted entirely to youth. In 1930, President Hoover convened a White House conference on children which issued a children's chapter valid to this day. In 1959, the United Nations adopted a declaration of the rights of children and in 1979 celebrated the International Year of the Child.

Yet, statistics concerning child abuse are staggering. Between one and two million a year are victimized. Half million by neglect, over 300,000 physically damaged and, shockingly, over 100,000 subject to sexual assault by those responsible for their care.

The 1980 charter recognized a child's right to a stable home, adequate clothing, shelter and health care. It stated that all these should be provided by parents where possible and if they're unwilling or unable it becomes the larger society's responsibility to do so.

Who can disagree that to protect children from violence and rehabilitate sick parents should be a number one priority for all of us.

Racist trees

In my lifetime trees have been planted in cities for a number of reasons . . . to beautify sidewalks, to provide shade from the blistering sun, to break the stark architecture of large buildings or simply to provide beauty in what would otherwise be an ugly urban setting.

But the latest such use of trees comes to me as a shock! Plant trees to keep an area white!

That's why Pretoria, South Africa, does it. It appears that one of their amateur soccer associations used a publicly-owned field in the city recently for a mixed soccer game.

By mixed, I mean teams composed of colored, whites and perhaps even some blacks. Unfortunately, the soccer club committed the cardinal South African sin of failing to ask permission to have a racially mixed game . . . and now they and every other person in Pretoria is paying the price.

The city council closed the playground! It's taking no chances of a repeat performance of interracial sports. They've planted trees in sections of the playing area! Apparently the council, which owns 90 percent of the playgrounds — is bent on turning Pretoria into the country's most densely wooded city . . . and the real issues are being obscured by the trees.

The 'Ins' versus the 'Outs' in Washington

BEHIND THE SCENES

by Ethel Payne

"The GOP shores up its gains as Democrats try to rebuild the party"

These lines from an old play, "State of the Union," are illustrative of the current condition of politics. Said the dotty dowager to the manager who had seen his candidate defeated: "I don't see any difference between the Democrats and the Republicans."

His retort was: "Madame, there's all the difference in the world. They're in and we're out!"

This week as the victorious Reagan administration was busy shoring up its gains, the defeated Democrats were attempting to rebuild their party from the wreckage of Nov. 4. Nearly 16 years ago following the landslide win of Lyndon Johnson for the presidency, a newspaper columnist forecast the permanent demise of the Republican Party as a viable force in American politics.

To paraphrase his words, he compared the GOP to an old lady fingering some shopworn cloth in a dingy store. Four years later, Richard Nixon, the Napoleon of modern day politics, made a triumphal return from his own Elbe in exile, only to later meet his Waterloo in the flood of scandal from Watergate.

Now, it was Ronald Reagan who snatched victory from the grasp of Jimmy Carter for a second time around. And the conservative pundits are saying that the Democratic Party is dead as the dominant power in the electoral process. Liberalism has been repudiated by the American people and is being replaced by "constructive protectionism."

The millionaire Reagan cabinet moved in as the less affluent Carterites moved out. Not in many moons have so many fat cats come to settle in the citadel of power on the banks of the Potomac River.

Sam Pierce, the lone black in the crowd, reported a modest worth of $1 to $2 million, while Bill Brock, heir to a candy fortune, weighed in with a little less than $10 million. It was austerity for federal employees, but pampers for Nancy as she was given free rein to lay it on with refurbishing the White House.

Meanwhile, over at the Democrat poorhouse, the rag taggle band of turned - out officeholders assembled to begin the work of re - building. Some were veterans of the Kennedy - Johnson administrations. They included such remembered names as Willard Wirtz, former Secretary of Labor; Adam Yarmolinsky, a former boy wonder and speech writer; former Gov. John Gilligan of Ohio; Peter Edelman, husband of Marian Wright Edelman, she of the Childrens' Defense Fund; Steve Schlossberg of the United Auto Workers and a newcomer who added some fairness in sex representation, Cathy Douglas, widow of the late Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, William O. Douglas.

The Carter delegation is composed of Hodding Carter, formerly the State Department spokesman and his wife, Pat Derian who was the human rights advocate at State; Congressman Mike Barnes of Maryland and a former aide to Sen. George McGovern, Harold Himmelman.

Conspicuously missing was some minorities representation and the question was whether the carpenters would even seek the advice of old professionals like Louis Martin who is now vice president for public relations at Howard U; Ron Brown, who stayed the course of the unsuccessful campaign of Sen. Edward Kennedy and is now minority counsel for the Senate Judiciary Committee, was not mentioned. All of these omissions lead to the conclusion that, like the dowager said, there is barely a shade of difference between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to recognizing minorities as equals in planning and policy making.

According to columnists Jack Germond and Jules Witcover, "the intention of the group is to become a think tank for the Democrats comparable to the conservative, but heavily Republican - oriented American Enterprise Institute."

MEETING THE PRESS — Facing reporters at his first full-fledged news conference since taking office, President Reagan, in what appeared to be contradictory positions to some, said he favored racial equality — but he opposed affirmative action programs which were aimed to open the doors to jobs traditionally closed to minorities. Reagan also said he would give assistance to efforts to track down the Atlanta child slayer.

Could this then be interpreted as a desperate move by Democrats to re - cast the party into a mould reminiscent of the Dixiecrats of the 30s - 40s and 50s whose battle cry was "segregation forever?"

It will be harder and harder to get new government contracts and grants under the Reagan administration. The freeze is on in hiring and spending. This means that the spate of new consultant firms springing up in the Capital are going to have to dig harder for clients.

Private foundations, once the fount from which many blessings flowed, are drying up too. However, with their extensive backgrounds in government procurement, people like former Army Secretary Clifford Alexander Jr., Alexis Herman, former Director of the Women's Bureau; and Ernest Green, former assistant secretary of Labor for Manpower Development, all of whom have gone into the consultants' business, should have no problem in making it.

All is not coming up roses, however, for the new administration. Conservative members of Congress who ardently supported the candidacy of Ronald Reagan are complaining bitterly that they have "been had" when it comes to appointments.

Specifically, they say that the aides to the president and some new cabinet members are ignoring them totally and slipping in ersatz conservatives who are really moderates in sheep clothing, as well as the unforgiveable heresy of naming Democrats to key positions. Among the distasteful appointments is that of Samuel Pierce as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. The cardinal sin is that he is black.

The long knives are being sharpened for Casper "Cap, the Knife" Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, who sent the entire transition team packing that had been assigned to review the Pentagon policies and practices, the day following his nomination to the post by President Reagan. Over in the Senate, that arch foe of everything smacking of liberalism, Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina, announced that he would seek to block all nominations for key positions in State and Defense that do not meet his standards of qualifications as true conservatives of right - wing ideology.

The guess includes cleaning out Carter appointed black ambassadors, Anne Holloway, Malawi; Walter Carrington, Senegal; Rudolph Aggrey, Roumania; Barbara Watson, Singapore and career diplomats, John Reinhardt, director of the International Communications Agency and W. Beverly Carter, a roving ambassador - at - large.

In Jackson, Miss., James Ratten who used to play football with Ronald Reagan when they were classmates at Eureka College, Ill. in 1931 - 32, said he is still "Dutch" (his college nickname) to him and he can't get out of the habit of referring to him that way.

Ratten, a retired black educator who is now 71 years old, muses that "Dutch" could have shaved his age by a year or two. The president will officially reach his 70th birthday next month. Both Ratten and Reagan were graduated from Eureka in 1932. While the latter landed a job with a radio station in Des Moines, Iowa, Ratten said he had to go pick pecans for a living in Texas.

We must now heighten the cry for jobs

By Gerald C. Horne

As the reign of Ronald Reagan begins, it becomes increasingly clear that the cry for "Jobs" must be heightened by the black community.

This is so because those who propelled the former host of "Death Valley Days" to power have no interest in alleviating the economic crisis dogging the black community.

In fact, Reagan's backers — despite their rhetoric about "putting America to work" — have been shutting down plants at a record rate.

In Reagan's home state of California, whose corporate bigwigs have bank-rolled his political efforts, 72,000 workers in 251 plants permanently lost their jobs through plant closings in 1980.

There is a clear affirmative action angle to this, as study after study has shown that plant closings disproportionately affect black workers.

For example, the Illinois State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, detailed how the wave of the closings affected highly unionized industries — e.g. auto and steel — where the black labor force was significant. Indeed, this study demonstrated how some plants close to avoid equal employment opportunity laws.

This study also exploded the myth that plants are closed because they are no longer profitable. To the contrary, because of the perverse operations of tax laws, corporations make financial killings by padlocking the gate and throwing thousands out of work. Professor Harry Brill of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, in a seminal article in the journal "Progressive," demonstrated how U.S. Steel, Bethlehem Steel and other behemoths have enjoyed record breaking years for profits at the same time they were closing down plants right and left.

The so-called "abandonment loss deduction" allows these monopolies to write off from its taxable income various accounting losses, which involve no cash outlay, e.g. the entire cost of land, equipment and plant, "good will" and "reputation" of the business, etc. Such deductions are usually stretched out over an extended time period but a sudden plant closing allows a deduction in lull as a one-time charge against income. Such a deduction can completely eliminate a firm's current federal tax liabilities for that year and can lead to substantial tax refunds to the company involved!

For example, after throwing thousands out of work in 1973, Bethlehem Steel through "creative" manipulation of the tax laws received a tax refund of $134 million. Moreover, by shutting down plants, corporations save millions as a result of vested rights (those with pension rights) receiving smaller retirement benefits because of their shorter term of service.

For the corporate giants, going out of business can be a profit-making orgy.

And when these plants are closed down and families are thrust on to welfare, that is not the end of the story. Frequently, shop is then set up in Taiwan, South Africa and other low-wage havens. Increasingly, these plants are retreating to the so-called "Sun-belt."

This mass exodus is also receiving impetus from the federal government. The Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties, appointed by President Carter, has stated unequivocally that instead of trying to stem this move to the "Sun-belt," it should be encouraged.

What this Commission did not emphasize was that plants are fleeing South for the same reason they are fleeing to South Africa — low wages and no unions. Take Texas, for example, the prototypical Sun-belt state.

According to the United States Census Bureau's ranking of median family income, Texas ranked 34th in the bureau's 1979 tally, exactly where it had been in 1959. Similarly, Mississippi remained mired in last place. Florida slipped a notch to 38th, while North Carolina moved up one place to 44th.

One reason why income is so low in these states is that unions are so few. North Carolina, with just 6.5 percent of its work force unionized is the least unionized state and representative, in that respect, of the entire so-called "Sun-belt." New York, a state that has been shell-shocked by numerous plant closings, not surprisingly has the highest percentage of union labor, 39.9 percent.

Thus, as can be seen, there are powerful economic forces propelling these plant closings, e.g. the shutdown of the shipyards in Chester, Pa. which has just thrown 3,000 workers — many of them black — into the streets.

The record of the incoming Secretary of Labor, Raymond J. Donovan, is not comforting. The company of which he is executive vice president, Schiavone Construction Company of Secaucus, N.J., has beep cited for violations 135 times over the last six years by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), with 57 of these being for "serious" violations. During the 1960s his company was cited for failure to comply with the Davis-Bacon Law, a federal statute requiring that "prevailing" wage rates — i.e. union rates — be paid to workers on federally financed construction projects.

Presently, the Office of Federal Contracts Compliance Programs — the federal agency that oversees the government's only mandated affirmative action effort — is currently investigating Donovan's firm for numerous alleged discriminatory employment practices.

Such facts are not reassuring to a black community that has suffered from plant closings and benefited from strong unions with backbone enough to stand up to arbitrary management decisions. The 3 million plus blacks in trade unions — heavily concentrated in the Northeastern and Midwestern states that corporations are attempting to flee — and the millions of other blacks who work for a wage will be on the cutting edge of efforts to resist the "Reaganaut" steamroller.

One of the early battles will no doubt involve an effort to sabotage the minimum wage law by way of a so-called "sub-minimum wage." Enacting a lower minimum wage for youth, according to study, would at best reduce teenage joblessness by a mere 3 percentage points.

Further, those hired as a result would cause displacement of older workers. In any event, as U.S. Department of Labor economist Willis Nordlund has averred, "The problem is an absence of jobs. A submimmum wage will not create jobs."

He went on to say that it would mean pay differentials for "two people working in the same place doing the same job. It boils down to legal pay discrimination."

Legal pay discrimination. Plant closings. No unions. This is the grim fate for black workers designed by Reagan and Company. But like so many other designs of mice and men, these plans too can go awry.

Though black workers would be well-advised not to expect much help from labor bosses like Lane Kirkland, the right-wing, anti-communist Southerner who heads the AFL-CIO and appears to be interested more in what goes on in Warsaw than Watts.

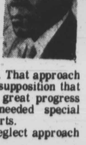
Victories can be won. Just ask the minority employees of the New York Times, who just won a $1.5 million suit where discrimination in pay, hiring and promotion had been charged; or the minority and women employees of Ford Motor Company who just won a suit awarding them a none too paltry $23 million; or the minorities who failed a discriminatory test administered by the U.S. Civil Service Commission, who were awarded $1.8 million; or the Black workers at J. P. Stevens, Inc. who just won the right to organize a union.

Yes, victories can be won. But it will require more organizing, more political education, more picketing, more marching, more lawsuits and more activity generally than the black community has shown since the 1960s.

Reagan should resist benign neglect

By Vernon E. Jordan Jr.

Given the enormous problems facing the nation, President Reagan may be strongly tempted to let urban priorities and the poor take a back seat to revving up the stagnant economy and shoring up our international position.



In effect, that would be a revival of the old "benign neglect" approach of the early Nixon years. That approach was based on the supposition that blacks had made great progress and no longer needed special governmental efforts.

A new benign neglect approach would probably be based on a different belief — that by solving the nation's economic dilemmas the administration would at the same time solve the economic problems of blacks. Therefore, no special efforts need be considered.

The new benign neglect approach would be as mistaken as the old. In both instances, the neglect would not have a benign effect at all. Rather, it would inevitably lead to a deterioration of conditions for poor people while impeding solutions to problems of inflation and unemployment.

One reason for this is that the free-market approach favored by the administration would — even if it turns the economy around in the long run — have serious negative short-term effects on the poor.

Low income families, for example, feel the brunt of inflation in sharply rising food and energy costs that take a greater part of their budgets than better-off households, which spend greater parts of their income on non-essentials.

That means the poor depend on government props like food stamps, minimum wages, and unemployment benefits. Few of the poor actually get such assistance, just as few actually get welfare. But their availability is important for many low income families.

If such income support programs were cut sharply or even, as some advocate, abandoned, those families would be in desperate straits. Even if, in the name of fighting inflation, eligibility standards are stiffened or public jobs programs cut, many inner city families would be shoved over the brink.

Theorists may claim that ultimately the lower federal spending and other measures will pay off in private sector job creation and lower inflation, but the reality is that the poor will suffer terribly until that happy day arrives.

Further, there is little reason to believe that many poor people, who lack skills and other credentials sought by private employers, will share in the revived economy. Without federally assisted job training and job creation programs, millions of people will not be absorbed into the mainstream of our economy.

Now that is not something people want to hear right now, in the heady flush of a new team in Washington spreading a new gospel. But it is a fact the new team must learn early in the game. It is all too easy to say government spending is out of control, blame social welfare programs for it, and then slam on the brakes.

But the only way, and it cannot be stressed too strongly — the only way — to limit federal social programs is to implement full employment with jobs for all who want to work. Those jobs should be productive, real jobs preferably in the private sector.

And that inevitably means some form of federal spending or, more accurately, federal investment in developing our nation's human resources. Whether through direct employment and training programs, federal subsidies, or through federal regulations on hiring the long-termers, unemployed, the federal role is essential and inescapable.

To suppose that simply unshackling the private sector is going to create jobs for all is a myth. The federal government will still have to shape its tax and regulatory policies in a way that encourages job creation where it is most needed, and not, as at present, in a way that drains jobs from our industrial heartlands to other regions or other countries.

A new policy of benign neglect is an invitation to further erosion of our cities, greater racial tensions in our society, and, ultimately, damage to our nation's ability to restore the economy and America's place in the world.