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Executive Director's Commentary

The Perceptions of Black Power and the Ongoing Struggle to Overcome

Although the mission of my work at Family Values Resource Institute, Inc. (FVRI) is not exclusively devoted to minorities, we serve a predominantly African-American base of individuals and families with our location in the urban community of North Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As this mission seeks to increase generational prosperity families through values for life and learning which also aligns with the broader purpose of promoting and protecting liberty and free enterprise in America, I have grown increasingly concerned for the perceptions that many Black people have of their power to overcome the effects of real or perceived past and present forces of oppression or disadvantage. In studying both the written history and oral stories I have encountered, I recognize that there have been a various perspectives for Black Power ranging from the most commendable non-violent Black Power of leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who advocated peacefully amassing political and economic influence to overcome oppression; to the solidarity Black Power of organizations such as the Black Panthers who began with the well intentions to confront violence against Blacks but unfortunately morphed into a tool of propaganda for socialism; and the militant separatist Black Power of radical organizations that descend into hate for hate in calls for retaliatory violence.

While the non-violent approach has taken more mainstream recognition, there is a lingering sentiment among many Black People that the change due to this influence

has not been effective or speedily enough. Some would argue there is a covert and systematic effort to disenfranchise Blacks at the institutional level despite the civil rights laws that protect from unfair discrimination while competing in free markets. Still others argue the need for the change to occur internally for overcoming victimization that hinders self-determination for the opportunities of free markets that are not just equally rationed to all. Unfortunately, many proponents of the former position have gained momentum, most notably through amplifying tragic incidents of violence against Blacks or the disproportionate incarceration of minorities; all while excoriating any attempts to highlight factors of personal responsibility that also play a role in preventing many of such tragic outcomes despite possible discriminatory factors with police. This has left many Black people convinced that the hope to overcome is in the power of government to legislate, or worse, through executive fiat to supposedly eliminate racism from the hearts and minds of people. This includes rallying calls of justice including attempts to circumvent due process to condemn alleged hate crimes through trials in the media instead of courts of law, often rationalized as justice for past injustices against Black victims and Black alleged wrongdoers, alike.

This state of perception for Black Power is most dangerous when embracing the unlimited power of government as the means to eliminate something that is indeed wrong and should not occur. However, does the end justify the means when we really consider what is at stake for what makes America exceptional? To demonstrate this point, I refer to a recent speech from a former candidate for President of the United States (I will withhold his or her name as our organization does not seek to endorse any past or present candidate or political party). The candidate explained that the principles of liberty in American are based on two core beliefs that: (1) every person regardless of

race, sex, creed or even religious affiliation has God-given gifts and potential to achieve; and (2) the single greatest threat to people achieving their potential is the abuse of power that is concentrated in the hands of one or a few.

Despite the dangers of such perceptions to the blessings of liberty in America, this belief that Black people need to embrace the power of government to overcome has been and is undoubtedly an ongoing indoctrination of Black students. While the examples of the protests that swept across college campuses targeting the removal of administrators are resounding enough (including those accused for essentially not using their power to investigate and prosecute anonymous incidents and/or deny First Amendment rights of students whose free speech discomforts other students), I am further concerned because of a recent article in the local newspaper in Baton Rouge. A local Black high school student was featured, and most deservedly so, for his amazing artistic talent that was displayed in a mural that he painted on a wall of the campus for a class assignment¹. As the school is mostly African-American, the mural was created as a tribute to five figures in Black History. Under the face of each figure, there was a one-word encapsulation of the figures which included: “Peace” for Martin Luther King, Jr., “Power” for Barack Obama, “Respect” for Malcolm X, “Dignity” for Nelson Mandela, and “Love” for Bob Marley.

While I do not take issue with this student’s talent nor the tribute to Black figures itself, it is the choice of words used to portray each that raises concern. More so, two that I believe young Black males, especially in urban communities, will more likely seek

¹ Couvillion, E. (2016, April 17). Talented Donaldsonville High artist winning raves for his murals of black leaders. *The Advocate*. Retrieved from <http://www.theadvocate.com/news/15418405-124/talented-donaldsonville-high-artist-winning-raves-for-his-murals-of-black-leaders>

to emulate the figure who exemplified the terms: respect and power. While the danger of possibly reinforcing the perspective that Black people only gain respect through more militant approaches to confronting racism concerns me (especially if misinformed of history that Malcolm X later reversed some of his radical views of hatred), I believe the more damaging implication to a proper perspective for limited government is to have the first Black President of the United States defined as power. While the President of the United States without respect to person is regarded as the most powerful figure in the free world, the mural appeared to connect the word with their influence more than their office or profession. Therefore, a popular perception is that a Black person will *finally* have the power to help Black people overcome and eliminate the barriers of racism and discrimination (despite the fact that President Obama would rightly say that he is not just the President of Black people and even publically acknowledge issues of personal responsibility to overcome). Nevertheless, I continue in my work to foster the *dignity* gained in the opportunities to develop and contribute the gifts and talents given to us in *love* from our creator to who we know all *power* and glory belongs; and through restoring *respect* for the wisdom of governing by principles from His Word will our country enjoy the *peace* in being one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

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