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Rowan, 'Propaganda Babes in the Woods'
 The following was excerpted from an
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 Carl T. Rowan, at Howard University's
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20



'Propaganda Babes In the Woods'

By Carl T. Rowan

This is a time of both gloom and hope for Black America. Gloom because unyielding racial discrimination keeps Black America in economic distress. And the American political process, along with the mood created by the media, have fostered terms like "reverse discrimination," and legal actions exemplified by *Bakke* and *Weber*, with the result that the position of the Black family, relative to the white one, has worsened. In fact, the Black family is being destroyed.

When I came to Washington almost 19 years ago to join the Kennedy Administration, the normal Black family had \$54 income for every \$100 the normal white family had.

Through the anti-poverty program and other programs of "The New Frontier" and "The Great Society," the income level of Black families increased appreciably — to the point that by 1967 the Black family had \$64 for every \$100 available to the white family.

Then, in the late 1960s, along with Richard Nixon, came a period of poison. Racist code-phrases like "law and order," "welfare bum," "food stamp chiseler," "reverse discrimination," "racial quotas" soon filled the air, the airwaves and the pages of America's newspapers. "Big spender" and "big government" suddenly were abhorred by Americans more than hunger, injustice, joblessness, bigotry.

In this ugly new dog-eat-dog America, social progress virtually stopped, at least where Blacks were concerned. Black family income began to decline relative to that of whites. Black joblessness began to rise. Current Labor Department figures show white unemployment at 5.3 percent and Black joblessness at 11 percent.

And what has happened to Black family income? It has slipped back to where the Black family has only \$57 for every \$100 available to the white family.

That is not just another of the statistics of racism in America. It is reflected in the high rate of divorce among Blacks; the appallingly high number of Black families headed by women; the atrociously high number of Black girls and young women who are sexually exploited and brutalized, who bear babies out of wedlock, whose lives become dead-end at age 16, 14, even 12.

How does this happen to us Black people? How do we let Black family income rise from 54% to 64% and then fall back to 57%? How do we let a civil rights movement fall into limbo?

We succumb to frustration: "Whitey ain't never gonna let me be equal — so to hell with integration." We lapse into schizophrenia: "How come Pat Harris heads HUD [former secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development] and she doesn't force all them white suburbs to let Blacks in?" is Tuesday's cry. Wednesday, at the barber shop, the same person is gossiping about a friend who saved up his money, challenged the realty system, and bought a home in what was an all-white suburb. "Why would old Jim do that? That nigger wants to be white!"

But the reason for Black impotence and despair that troubles me most is the fact that we are propaganda babes in the woods. We have failed to give sufficient emphasis to these things:

- The power of trained intelligence.
- The need for Blacks to get into position to influence, even manipulate, the communications media.

Let's face it: Black Americans have been out-propagandized on law and order, welfare, reverse discrimination, Rhodesia — well, you name the issue, and you will have to admit that we have

not gotten our licks in, either in the media or the Congress, or the White House.

Ed Brooke fought a valiant struggle in the Senate to prevent a situation where rich women can get abortion after abortion, but poor Black women must bear babies that they do not want. Now Brooke — the sole Black voice in a powerful body of 100 [U. S. Senate] — is gone. Tragic.

In the House of Representatives, the Black Caucus is increasing in stature, but it still does not wield enough influence in a body of 435 to prevent the House from many actions that are inimical to the well-being of Black Americans. Imagine a majority of the House voting down implementation of the Panama Canal Treaty. The "Colonel Blimp" colonial mentality is very much alive in the House.

So we have a Senate, newly-steeped in fear of the Soviet Union, that votes to reduce spending on social programs in fiscal 1980 by \$3.6 billion — a cut in welfare payments and unemployment benefits, for example — while at the same time increasing the defense budget by \$25 billion over the next three years.

The House is balking, reluctant to go along with this madness, thank God, but the point remains that you and most of Black America are not even in on the discussion.

While some senators talk about reducing funds for social programs, the price of heating oil has gone up 50 percent since January and 100 percent since 1976. Food prices have risen 20 percent in two years.

Half the Black families in America live on \$10,142 or less. The Bureau of Labor Statistics says \$11,586 is needed for a low standard of living. Will you tell me how — given today's prices — a couple with three children can pay for rent.

food, fuel, transportation, clothing and still provide education and a decent chance in life for the youngsters on \$10,000 a year? That is why those Black families do not buy books, subscribe to newspapers or magazines. It is one reason why a lot of Black Johnnies cannot read or write, and why Black adults do not know enough about what is going on to put proper pressure on the politicians.

John O'Leary [former deputy secretary of energy] says millions of Americans face a cruel choice this winter: "Heat or eat," "food or fuel." You know and I know that the cruel choice will fall upon a disproportionate number of Blacks and other minorities.

But how well-prepared are we, even college professors, to fight to ensure that Blacks do not suffer unfairly?

How many people have taken a look lately at the Food Stamp program? Carter "reformed" it, mostly to appease the conservatives who were making it a political football. He got Congress to remove the purchase provisions which kept many of the very poorest families from participating because they simply didn't have the money to purchase some [food stamps] so they could get more food stamps free.

But in order to embrace the pitifully poor, a compromise was struck where the so-called marginally poor would be excluded. It is a tragic truth that millions of Americans whose earnings are below the poverty level (\$7680 for a family of four) do not get food stamps. More than half the 18 million Americans who eat off food stamps are in families with incomes below \$3,600 a year — or \$10 a day.

The program has been running at \$7 billion a year, which is a lot of money, to be sure. But it is not enough.

'Make no little plans. They have no power to stir men's blood and probably in themselves will not be realized...'

I started out talking about gloom and hope. I've given you so big a dose of gloom that you have to be asking, "Where is the hope?"

It's out there, in the form of teachers and students at dozens of institutions like Howard University.

How do I say that with certainty? From personal experience. From time to time, one of you students is wild enough to decide to write a term paper, or thesis, about me. After I'm badgered for an interview for days, I relent, and the student shows up to ask, in one way or another:

"How does a Black man who used to hoe bulb grass at 10 cents an hour, who belonged to a family in which no one ever had graduated from high school — let alone college — wind up winning a bitter public feud with J. Edgar Hoover, getting on Richard Nixon's enemies list and surviving, criticizing Jimmy Carter and still getting invited to Camp David for talks about the energy crisis?"

How? Because 38 years ago I was given much the same kind of opportunity as you youngsters. I left my little town of McMinnville, Tennessee, and went to Tennessee State, scared absolutely to death, wondering how in the world somebody from my terrible little school could compete with children from high schools in places like Nashville, Knoxville, Memphis and Chattanooga. I got down to Tennessee State and — lo and behold — what did they do. They put me in an *art* class. They never heard of art in my high school. But I went in and the teacher, Miss Frances Thompson, looked out.

22 She said, "I want each of you to take a piece of paper and I want you to write on that piece of paper the grade you expect to get in my class." Well, I summoned up all the courage I could muster and put a big C on that piece of paper.

We passed the papers back and she riffled through them and paused and said: "Would Carl Rowan from McMinnville, Tennessee, raise his hand?" I stuck my hand up. She said, "Would you stay after class for a moment for a little chat with me?" I said, "yes, ma'am." The other students left and she said, "Did it surprise you that I knew you were from McMinnville?" I said, "no, ma'am." She said, "Would it surprise you if I told you I knew every grade you got in high school?" I said, "no, ma'am." She said, "Well, I know you didn't get a C in your life and I want to know why you would put a C on that piece of paper?" And I sat there, speechless, as she pulled open a drawer. She said, "I want to read you something." And she brought out a piece of paper and read me some words written in 1926 by a man named Daniel Berman. Those words were: "Make no little plans. They have no power to stir men's blood and probably in themselves will not be realized. Make big plans in the hopes that through the years they will become a thing of living, burning intensity." She handed me another piece of paper, and I said: "If that's the way she wants it!" I put a big A on that piece of paper. I can tell you that no teacher in human history ever worked so hard to earn her student an A as Frances Thompson did.

That was exactly what a little green country kid needed — a bit of confidence, a bit of belief. And I'm asking you, especially those of you who are interested in communications, to believe, to believe that you can come out there and at least do something to make America less a dog-eat-dog place and a country with a little bit

more heart and a little bit more dedication to that sense of justice that raises its head every so often and then gets knocked down.

Frances Thompson, and a few other teachers like her, taught me that you cannot beat the system, in fact you cannot survive in this system as a real man or woman, without education — and without staying abreast of the developments that affect you and those you love.

Some jokers who have surrendered to bigotry are always trying to sell "separatism." They make it sound palatable to the ill-informed and spineless. As for me, I'm going to have lunch where James Kilpatrick, George Will and Hugh Sidey [co-panelists in a local TV show] have lunch. If I don't hear what they hear, read what they read, drink with whom they drink, how do I compete?

It would be difficult for Blacks to compete if they cannot articulate their aspirations and grievances, and state their proposals forcefully.

If I could issue one heartfelt plea to our students it would be that you read at least two newspapers every day, at least one news magazine weekly, and watch a television news show at least once a day. If you don't know, you don't grow.

Beyond that, I beseech every student to fall in love with the English teacher. That will shield you from the misguided jokers who, in their frustrations, go about telling Black kids that they don't have to learn "the white man's language," that "Black English" is OK, and adequate, and furthermore it is a symbol of Black pride.

Good English never belonged to Winston Churchill; it was employed masterfully by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Standard English was not the property of John F. Kennedy; it was used with consummate skill by Whitney

Young, Jr. Convincing, eloquent English was not a private possession of Eleanor Roosevelt; it helped to make Mary McLeod Bethune a force for Black freedom that we shall honor for as long as Black men and women breathe. Jesse Jackson catches hell for seeing Arafat. Espousing justice for Palestinians is unconstitutional, you will assume from the clamor. But when the press grabs him, I don't worry about Jackson. He has the facts and he can talk — in English.

We, as a people, need so many things so desperately. More doctors and dentists, teachers and therapists, scientists and sociologists. But we need nothing more than our youngsters moving on to the editorial boards of newspapers, helping to decide what goes on television screens as the news of the night, helping in meaningful ways to shape the mentality of America.

We need more discipline in Black America. We need more determination in Black America. We need more sacrifice in Black America. And, we need more trained intelligence in Black America.

Without dedication to these truths, we shall forever be burdened by the problems of grade school violence, high school drugs and dropouts, adults who cannot read and write well enough to answer a want ad or get a driver's license. We shall for times unlimited see our communities in economic despair, our children face to face with human degradation, our families rent asunder by self-hatred and hopelessness.

By God, we shall do better than that. □