Tillinghast 2008


“I have read some of the comments on Senator Obama and Rev. Wright here and elsewhere. My interest is exclusively with regard to how Black people and their supporters are processing these most recent and seemingly galvanizing events. They are so obviously staged, but by whom and for what purpose? Apparently, it is not sufficient that as a nation and country, we are bombing, destroying and wrecking the planet. It seems lost that the American presidency has large implications at home and abroad. In the middle of a timed contest for the biggest political prize, we/progressives of many hues now pause to consider aloud who can express our pain and disappointment in the American Ideal. I include Rev. Wright in this comment. Excuse me, but our particulars are not the contest. By harping aloud and meanly on our insecurities, we give fodder to the machinations of those who are without question our opponents who happen also to be Obama’s as well. We have never had anyone express in full flurry, much less fury, our particular business here on these shores. And, as much as it would be a shot in the arm for my aging political utility, even I recognize that is not the role of the president all other related issues notwithstanding.

It is amazing to me how many people expand and denigrate other people’s work, try to inject "their" agenda into someone else's agenda. And, then how many others get diverted from the larger picture missing the bigger argument even among our own intelligent progressives. Can we follow the bouncing ball? Where did it – Rev. Wright, for example
– come from and why has the press continued to project him as a campaign issue? Who threw his name into the ring? The Clintons and their Republican allies are calling in their chips.

Mounted on the back of one man are the hopes of many -- not all of them Black -- and not all of them American or in the USA. Barack Obama is running for high office. Of course, the inter-racial support is fragile, so what? Whatever we have been able to wrestle for ourselves in Europe and in the Americas -- and for now I will omit Africa, itself and the Middle East -- has been fragile so, let me know when you get some real news!

Endemic to progressives is quibbling because much of the “work” is gamesmanship rather than actual work. Much valuable time is lost over whether someone or something is more correct than another. Only few can speak to the experience of application. Nevertheless, the human condition is one long chain of events of exploitation with brief moments of interruption branching in numerous directions. Art interrupts; learning interrupts and so does political will among other bursts. Can political will triumph over habit? The historical record suggests that the people who see and do what must be done can turn the tide, but cannot hold it for long. Nevertheless, we progressives are encouraged by those moments in time when the brave, the few, the over-powered and the out-maneuvered make the effort. This is not just an American phenomena, this is the advance of humankind. Who knows being in the moment when the direction of events MIGHT pivot in another [better?] direction? [editor’s note: brackets appeared in the original and are not my addition.]
Activists appreciate and seize the moment, riding the waves of changing thought. Otherwise, the discussion is purely the format for an academic setting or the lounge -- wherever and whenever time and effort are not as costly as is the case when time rules. We understand that the game plan is mostly obscure. That’s American politics! It doesn't mean that the ranging conversation is less important overall, it’s just less important in that particular time and space.

In our day and time, what could have been more fragile than the boycotts, the sit-ins, the marches, the court cases and the jailings, the loses and the deaths? It didn't keep us from trying then and some of us are still trying even now. And, frankly, when we got tired, [we] went our various ways as there were no rewards for us who waged the struggle; we needed to get on with some semblance of our lives. Then the parasites showed up largely at the public trough – folks much more to the liking of the power structure – than we were. They manipulated our words, purportedly spoke for us and in doing so changed to the direction of the Movement laying siege to our legacy to suit their personal agendas and their masters' purposes. But, now that's another story. . . .

Obama and Wright are two buoys, not of equal size or purpose, in the sea of American interest which is churning with self-interest. One is a studied detractor from the other. So it is and so it will be. What are our rights with regard to those interests? That answer will vary from individual to individual, pundit to pundit. Let me, therefore, advance my own thinking: I would relegate Rev. Wright here and now to the bench to wait out the contest.
There is nothing being said now that hasn’t been said before and will not be said again. Only after the contest, this will not be first page news. Obama is the first real shot at the presidency for a known person of color; he is the first non-illusionary frontrunner. He should, therefore, be given the support of those who believe that he is the best choice between the contenders. Neither Hillary nor McCain offer or promise any substantive change from the current status quo, real or imagined.

There are formal and informal channels of lobbied interest. We should use what we have and establish others. They are not the newspaper or the television or radio shouting our sound-bites to someone in the contest. Would you have shouted maneuvers to Mohammed Ali from the 300th row behind the pillars while he was locking arms with Liston or Frazier? Even if various speakers are correct, they, admittedly see things from another perspective and another vantage point. What is to be made of our musings and shouts when the moment is upon someone else, confusion and loss of momentum. This is where leadership can and should be exercised. Obama is not the savior of us or the nation, but he’s one of the good guys. He's just one guy in a sea of sharks. Let's try not to be one of them.