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Cover Story
BC vs. The Wall Street Journal
by BC Associate Editor Bruce Dixon

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In their quest for absolute political hegemony in the United States, some elements of the Right now dare to claim to share with blacks – if not common cause – common conclusions about the state of race relations in America. In a January 8, 2006 piece weighted with the full freight of centuries of white supremacist delusions, Wall Street Journal columnist James Taranto claimed that **BC's** January 5, 2006 Cover Story, "Katrina Study: Black Consensus, White Dispute," showed that **BC** and the WSJ agree that African Americans and whites see the world quite differently.

The **BC** story was based on a small slice of an important, soon to be released study by University of Chicago political scientist Michael Dawson. Dr. Dawson's team's study shows what every conscious Black person already knows: there is a yawning chasm between white and black perceptions of life, politics and opportunity in 21st Century America.

The United States has created wildly different realities for its black and white citizens. From the unequal availability of prenatal care and early childhood education, through ubiquitous and continuing racially segregated education and racially selective policies of crime control and mass imprisonment, through generations of housing and employment discrimination resulting in huge gaps in the accumulation of wealth between black and white families, to early graves occasioned by differential access to medical care for African Americans, it is clear that for centuries blacks and whites have lived in the same country but in different worlds. Perhaps we should be grateful that the esteemed editor of the Wall Street Journal's opinion page has deigned to acknowledge this fact. Or maybe not.

The WSJ's Taranto begins his January 8, 2005 OpinionJournal.com column thusly:

The Black Commentator – Cover Story: BC vs. The Wall Street Journal

"BlackCommentator.com, which describes itself as a source of 'commentary, analysis and investigations on issues affecting African Americans' and has a harshly left-wing outlook, has an analysis of a poll on racial attitudes in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. **BC.com's** analysis is remarkably similar to our analysis, back in September, of a similar poll."

Taranto goes on to quote **BC** at some length:

"Hurricane Katrina may mark a watershed in Black perceptions of the African American presence and prospects in the United States. 'It could very well shape this generation of young people in the same way that the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King shaped our generation,' said Prof. Michael Dawson, of the University of Chicago whose team conducted a survey of Black and white reactions to the disaster between October 28 and November 17, 2005. 'It suggested to Blacks the utter lack of the liberal possibility in the United States,' said Dawson, the nation's premier Black social demographer.

"Huge majorities of Blacks agreed that the federal government's response would have been faster if the victims of Katrina in New Orleans had been white (84 percent), and that the Katrina experience shows there is a lesson to be learned about continued racial inequality (90 percent).

"But only 20 percent of whites believe that the federal government's failure to respond had anything to do with race, and only 38 percent think there is something to be learned about racial inequality from the Katrina disaster. . . .

"A Grand Canyon looms between the way African Americans and white people view the world, despite the fact that both groups are privy to the same information and images.

Same planet. Different worlds. Unintentionally, Taranto manages to prove both his and our point by misstating his very small area of agreement with us harsh leftists at **BC**. The poll he cites does indeed illuminate the same gulf between black and white views of the Katrina disaster as last week's **BC** cover story reported. What the Wall Street Journal agrees with **BC** about, and then only implicitly, is the existence of what we call the Black Consensus. But what Taranto offers by way of "analysis" is the very embodiment of racist arrogance. He writes:

"The truth about race that Katrina illuminates, then, is that, at least when it comes to matters involving race, black Americans are extreme political outliers. This is why attempts to play the race card are politically futile: They have to appeal not just to blacks, but to a substantial minority of whites. The Gallup poll results make clear that the current racial appeals are not resonating with whites."

Here we find exposed the delusional heart of whiteness. Taranto would dismiss African American opinions on race wholesale as "extreme," "outlying," and "playing the race card." For the Wall Street Journal and the chunk of America's ruling elite and wannabes it speaks for and to, black opinion fails the fundamental test of legitimacy simply because it differs from white opinion. Taranto goes on to supersize his ahistorical silliness.

"Why do blacks and whites have such divergent views on racial matters? We would argue that it is because of the course that racial policies have taken over the past 40 years..."

For Taranto, the difference between black and white views on race owes nothing to centuries of slavery, nothing to generations of de jure and de facto segregation. It has nothing to do with the criminalization of a generation of black youth by a racially selective crime control and prison industry, and is completely

The Black Commentator – Cover Story: BC vs. The Wall Street Journal

unrelated to the fact that African Americans pay more for the same services, are compensated less for the same education and job performance, live shorter lives with less medical care and are much more likely to experience poverty, especially as elders or children. For Taranto, nearly four hundred years and counting of black experience in America that often differs substantially from that of our white neighbors, is irrelevant. Instead, it all stems from white resentment at being "discriminated" against by affirmative action, and black sour grapes at not achieving "equality of results" in the imagined meritocracy that is the Wall Street Journal's America. The solution recommended by the editor of WSJ's opinion page is for white America to stay the course and wait out the Black Consensus until it's replaced by what he calls "more nuanced ideas about race" in a decade or two.

We suspect Mr. Taranto is in for a much longer wait than he expects. The Black Consensus that he would de-legitimize, wait out or wish away, and the distance between it and white opinion is an outcome of white supremacy as practiced by America's ruling circles and actively or passively endorsed by most of its white citizens. The gap between white and black opinion will only narrow if and to the extent that American whites learn to stop thinking like white people so that progress can be made toward equality of opportunity for everybody, a goal which Taranto also dismisses as impractical and unworthy.

In a sane, democratic and educated society, whose citizens are acquainted with their own history and served by a press and broadcast media which equips them with the information necessary to the exercise of responsible citizenship, septic nonsense like Taranto's would be swiftly laughed out of the public space. But this is 21st century America, where unelected pirates rule, the public airwaves are private property and the press is only free for those who own it.

Black public opinion does not have to be legitimized by whites. The Black Consensus is not the voice of extremists and outliers. It is the prophetic voice that calls all of us, of whatever color, class and creed to responsible citizenship and real humanity. African Americans knew, presumably with near unanimity that slavery was wrong before most of white America would admit it. Our black grandparents and great grandparents were certain that convict leasing, Jim Crow and lynching were abominations at the same time the Supreme Court and white public opinion ignored or endorsed these practices. Were our forbears right all along? Or only when whites agreed with them?

Today black public opinion opposes the war in Iraq by more than two to one. African Americans overwhelmingly favor full and equal funding for public education, ending the so-called drug war, mandating the right to organize and join unions, health care as a human right, and impeachment of the president. Are we extremists? Outliers? Or prophets? Time will tell.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Dr. Michael Dawson, the nation's foremost black demographer, for his pioneering research into black public opinion, black political thought, and the Black Consensus. The three questions in last week's **BC cover story** were lifted from a larger study of the state of public opinion in America's black communities that will be published very soon. Look out for it. If Taranto and the Wall Street Journal admire Dr. Dawson's science and **BC's** logical analysis, we find that interesting. But being "harsh leftists," we are not flattered.

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