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BLACK
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Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

Issue 177 – March 30 2006

Cover Story
Rep. Harold Ford, Jr. Insults His Grandmother and Our People
by BC Publishers Glen Ford and Peter Gamble

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Rep. Harold Ford, Jr., who wants to become a U.S. Senator from Tennessee, has sunk lower than a snake. He has defamed his grandmother, and his great-grandparents, by claiming that their lives were frauds and lies – that they were whites passing for Black.

There seem to be no limits to the young congressman's perfidy and stupidity. In the process of depicting his own ancestors as people living a lie, Ford has also insulted the Black public and Black history – not to mention common sense, a quality of which Harold Jr. seems to be totally lacking.

Printer friendly cartoon: Harold Ford, Jr. Slanders His Grandmother's Name

Ford's allegation, now mimicked by much of his highly political family, but never mentioned by any family member before the 35-year-old senatorial candidate casually smeared his grandmother in USA Today, in December, defies all reason. Grandmother Vera Ford, who died in 1994 at the age of 78, was the daughter of John Davis and Lottie McGinnis, both of whose death certificates list them as "Negro" – as skillfully reported by the Memphis Commercial Appeal's Wendi C. Thomas on March 19.

Vera Ford's parents were married at a time of great racial violence in Tennessee and the nation. Shelby County – Memphis – recorded the highest number of lynchings of Blacks in the state. In 1917, a year after Vera's birth, according to the Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, white mobs vented their racist anger en mass:

Tennessee's "greatest lynching carnival" was held in Memphis in May 1917 when Ell Person, the allegedly confessed ax-murderer of a sixteen-year-old white girl, was burned to death in the presence of fifteen thousand men, women, and little children. The mother of the murdered

child cheered the mob as they poured oil on the man and set him afire. The Memphis Press said that "the mob fought and screamed and crowded to get a glimpse of him and the mob closed in and struggled about the fire."

Young Harold Ford (known as "The Prince"), who ascended to his father's congressional seat at the age of 26 in 1996, would have us believe that, during this period of murderous white mob violence, a white couple from Memphis would *both* decide to become Black, and to subject their children to Jim Crow schools and lynch law justice. It defies all reason – an amazing fiction concocted in Harold Jr.'s head for purposes unknown.

Grandmother Vera attended all-Black Booker T. Washington High School. In 1934, at age 19, she married Harold's grandfather, N.J. Ford, a somewhat darker Black man. Together, they launched the family funeral home and political dynasty. Nobody questioned Vera's Blackness. As Wendi Thomas reports, "Vera was named the Tennessee Mother of the Year, 'the first black woman ever so honored in Tennessee,' the Nashville Banner wrote in 1976."

Vera's death certificate, like those of her parents, John and Lottie, identifies her as Black.

There is a level of corruption that even the Ford family of Memphis have never stooped to – until now. Harold "The Prince" Jr. has submerged himself in the muck, and all but one close family member has dived in with him in order to save his senatorial campaign. None say that Vera ever fessed up to being white. Retroactively, they now say it was assumed. "She looked white," (indicted) son state senator John Ford told reporter Wendi Thomas.

Actually, we don't think she looks white – however, we have eyes trained for this sort of thing. But that's not the point. The Ford's collective violation against Black people's history in this country is far more disturbing than the pretensions and self-debasement of one Black family. They make a fiction of their own family history, and thus allow others to extrapolate larger fictions, to further confuse the Black and white public about the real nature of African American's past and present.

There is really only one definition for the people who became African Americans: those who were eligible to be legally sold as chattel, and whose children were condemned to also be chattel for slavemaster scum. The "one drop" and "one-sixteenth" Black blood rule was simply a commercial arrangement, that allowed white men to exercise their sexual privileges among the slaves while carrying no parental obligations. As a result, the United States became the only country in the world in which rich and respected men routinely sold their own children – an abomination almost beyond comprehension, one that challenges normal notions of human behavior.



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Because of the high cost of slaves in the U.S. – the driving force in this grotesque social arrangement that led to child-selling – and because the United States had a large and heavily armed white population, there was no need to create a mulatto class with privileges recognized by the white rulers. Unlike elsewhere in the African Diaspora, the "one drop" rule reigned. All of the "one drop" or more people were herded together, to be sold during slavery, and Jim Crowed in its aftermath.

However, in this centuries-long process, a people came into being: African Americans of many hues but sharing the same references and history. During slavery, all could be sold. Afterwards, all could be lynched, and all were segregated – unless they "passed," which usually required leaving the region where everybody knew who was who and where they came from. But most did not, because of their ties to their land, family,

community and collective aspirations.

A distinct people emerged from the cauldron, a people who developed their own institutions *in opposition to white institutions*, and their own view of the world. A people with a sense of community that had been forged in – among the many oppressions of slavery and Jim Crow – the sexual oppression of Black women that created the multi-hued African American group.

Vera Ford belonged to that group, as did her parents, John and Lottie. They did not "pass" but stayed within the community. Now, her grandson, the despicable and underbrained brat who wants to be a senator, is casting her out, claiming she was white.

Of the Ford family, only aunt Barbara Ford Branch, a retired lawyer who lives in New York City, seems to have an ounce of pride in her family or her people. "I will not let them try to make my mother something she wasn't," Ms. Branch told the Memphis Commercial Appeal's Wendi Thomas.

However, Ms. Thomas, who is Black, strays into nasty territory when she introduces the now-familiar white line that race is a "social construct." Of course it is. But this "construct" has vast social consequences, that led to annihilation of peoples (most Native Americans, all Tasmanians) and to the creation of new nations of people. The "social construct" term has been interpreted by white popular media as meaning "socially irrelevant" – which is a convenient way for them to say race doesn't matter, so get over it. But the centuries of slavery and racial oppression that have been justified by the "construct" are not irrelevant. They are facts.

These cumulative events – the lives, struggles and accomplishment of millions of people who came to call themselves Black Americans – have created a unique people in the world. Vera Ford was one of them, as were her parents.

Harold Ford Jr. desecrates their graves, and should hang his head in shame. But he won't, because he is shameless. And amoral.

Glen Ford and Peter Gamble are writing a book titled, "Barack Obama and the Crisis in Black Leadership."