

MIDWEEK PERSPECTIVES

TRB FROM WASHINGTON / HENDRIK HERTZBERG

A perfect job for Jackson

WASHINGTON

Here's some common ground between Jesse Jackson and the Democratic Party: They both have a Jesse Jackson problem.

The party's Jackson problem is chronic and obvious. Jackson's Jackson problem is acute and not so obvious. Its symptoms include a compulsion to thrash around in the mud of Chicago politics, an inability to decide between joining the party and merely using it, and an unwillingness to grasp the political opportunity of a lifetime.

Jackson says he has "not yet made the decision to run for president in 1992," which is like the sun saying it has not yet made the decision to rise tomorrow. The inevitable will be followed by the predictable:

Jackson runs. In the primaries he gets about as many votes as he did in 1988, but rules changes give him a larger bloc of delegates. He has no chance of getting the nomination but carries the fight to the convention anyway. The "What does Jesse want?" articles start coming out. Jackson declares that because he came in second, he has "earned" the second spot on the ticket. The nominee decides otherwise. After more tense days, Jackson gets the spotlight at the convention, makes the big speech, and is promised a plane and a budget for the fall campaign. Keeping him happy absorbs quantities of the nominee's time.

This dreary, inexorable, no-longer-novel scenario is, of course, the party's problem, but it is also Jackson's. He is repeating himself on a grand scale.

It is not only the prospect of a third Jackson candidacy (and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, after which Jackson will still be younger than George Bush is now) that tries the patience of Democratic Party professionals. At the presidential level, party loyalty counts for something. Jackson has — and is — a problem in this area. Witness the Chicago imbroglio.

The story so far: When Chicago Mayor Harold Washington died at the end of 1987, white aldermen, with the help of a few blacks, chose Eugene Sawyer over Timothy Evans, whom Jackson favored, to serve until a special election this year. In the Feb. 28 Democratic primary, Jackson vigorously supported Sawyer over Richard M.

Daley, son of the late, legendary Richard J. Daley.

Despite Jackson's urgings, Timothy Evans refused to endorse Sawyer, deciding instead to run independently in the April 4 general election as the candidate of the "Harold Washington Party." Daley won the primary handily. Sawyer is staying neutral. Democratic National Chairman Ron Brown, who was Jackson's convention manager last year, is supporting Daley. And Jackson is supporting Evans. All clear?

If Jackson were primarily a local politician, his decision to oppose the duly nominated candidate of his party might conceivably make sense. It would certainly make sense if Daley had run a racist campaign. But he didn't. On the contrary, he seems to be trying to model himself on Boston's Ray Flynn, another working-class Irishman who beat a black candidate and then went on to become a racial healer.

Perhaps Jackson is trying to protect his base. Some base. According to a recent

Chicago Sun-Times poll, a plurality of Chicagoans view Jackson unfavorably. Even among black Chicagoans, 22 percent view him unfavorably, including 13 percent who declare themselves "very unfavorably" disposed toward him.

Chicago, in short, has become a good town for Jesse Jackson to get out of, fast. As it happens, he has another place he can go, a city he's been trying to break into for years, albeit by a different route: Washington, D.C.

The District of Columbia has a mayoral election coming up next year, and Jackson could have the job for the asking. He has a home here, his kids have gone to school here, and voters here love him: He won 1984's D.C. presidential primary by a 2-to-1 margin, last year's by 4-to-1.

Jackson might not turn out to be much of a mayor, but he could hardly fail to look good by comparison to what had gone before. At the very least, he would perform the signal service of displacing a corrupt, incompetent municipal administration that has become a global embarrassment. The D.C. mayoralty is a hard job, but Marion Barry is an easy act to follow. By moving from Chicago to Washington, Jackson, to paraphrase the old joke, would raise the level of political leadership in both cities.

Jackson would presumably have to pass up his usual hopeless presidential run in 1992. But as chief executive of the capital of the Western world, he would have the platform he needs for his running commentary on national and even international affairs. And in 1996, assuming he had done a halfway decent job, he could rejoin the presidential fray with something new to boast about: credentials. No longer could it be said that Jesse Jackson had never been elected to anything, had never held public office, had never actually done anything about drugs, crime and education.

By becoming mayor of Washington, Jackson would at last move from the world of speeches and symbolism to the world of action and accomplishment. And this is why he will almost certainly forego the opportunity. He'd have to put up or shut up — the two things, judging from his record so far, he is most afraid to try. It's so much safer just to run, run, run.

Hendrik Hertzberg is an editor of *The New Republic*, in which this article first appeared. Michael Kinsley, the regular author of the TRB column, is on a leave of absence.



RICHARD COHEN

Maintaining a non-policy on Nicaragua

WASHINGTON

Is the Cold War over? President Bush has often been asked that question and his answer, to judge by his policies, is sometimes it is and sometimes it ain't. It ain't in Nicaragua, for instance.

I deduce that answer from the administration's request for yet more aid for the Nicaraguan Contras — those freedom fighters of yesteryear.

For as much as \$50 million, Bush wants to keep the Contras in their camps for at least another year to ensure that Nicaragua becomes a democracy and respects, as it should, civil liberties. What happens if it doesn't, the president has yet to say.

Policies are driven by theory or ideology. U.S. policy toward the Marxist regime in Nicaragua, as developed by Ronald Reagan, went like this: The Sandinista regime was a Soviet outpost in the Western Hemisphere, much like Cuba. The Reagan administration would not repeat John F. Kennedy's mistake with Cuba. It would, if it could, smear the Sandinistas.

Its intentions were plain, blunt — so obvious that the unironical Oliver North took them as his marching orders.

But much has changed since Reagan formulated that policy. So much has changed, in fact, that people now ask if the Cold War is over.

An expansionist Soviet empire is retrenching. The nation that invaded Afghanistan has withdrawn its troops. East Bloc countries, such as Hungary, are sort of tip-toeing out of the Soviet orbit, going their own way with market-oriented economies.

Afghanistan and Eastern Europe are, of course, on the Soviet border. If Moscow is retrenching in those places, could it be harboring fantasies of empire in the Western Hemisphere? Could it be seeking yet another Cuba, which is to say yet another client state with its hand out?

Could Mikhail Gorbachev, who is playing nice guy in the Middle East and being reasonable in Southern Africa, be seeking a client state that (never mind the economic costs) would put him in a collision course with the United States? Hardly.

Then what, precisely, is the rationale for continuing to aid the Contras?

The Bush administration says it wants to ensure that Nicaragua becomes a democracy, one that protects civil liberties. The Reagan administration used the same language, but never mind. These are worthy goals anyway. The question is whether they should be imposed by force. And why in Nicaragua?

The human-rights situation is hardly better in Guatemala or El Salvador, but we finance no insurrections in these countries.

The \$50 million the Bush administration seeks for the Contras amounts to an allowance for itself — a grant to avoid making some difficult policy decisions.

Civil liberties are hardly enjoyed in South Africa, but we respond with nothing more than economic sanctions.

Indeed, the world is full of authoritarian governments who wouldn't know civil liberties from a hole in the head. Yet, for the most part, we keep our powder dry.

Should the mujahedeen win in Afghanistan, neither democracy nor civil liberties will flourish, and women will enjoy all the rights accorded draft animals. Let me make a wild guess: We would not try to overthrow the new regime.

Why, then, Nicaragua? The answer can only be its communism and our anti-communism. But without massive amounts of Soviet aid, a nation of 3.5 million people, impoverished almost beyond belief, is no threat to us, and not much of one, really, to its neighbors.

Washington can use the Contras to pressure the Sandinista regime, but for how much longer? A resumption of the civil war is now almost out of the question.

The other Central American countries have come up with a peace plan; Nicaragua has loosened up. If it is not sincere in moving toward democracy, it can merely wait us out. If it is sincere, democracy can only be retarded by the presence of an enemy army on the border. Civil war and civil liberties hardly go hand-in-hand. Our own incarceration of Japanese-Americans during World War II proves that.

The \$50 million the Bush administration seeks for the Contras amounts to an allowance for itself — a grant to avoid making some difficult policy decisions. The administration has yet to respond to Gorbachev's initiatives and make its policies plain to the American people in areas such as arms control or NATO policy, and Central America is no different.

If Nicaragua represents a Communist threat, then the Bush administration ought to say so — and we can all laugh. If this little country represents nothing more than yet another loathsome regime (although less loathsome than most), then it ought to say that.

What's apparent is that the administration doesn't know what Nicaragua represents. But we do: an administration whose policy, for the time being, is to have none at all.

Richard Cohen is a columnist for the *Washington Post*.

BLACK ON BLACK / ROBERT BERKLEY HARPER

Making our communities more secure

The young black men who hassled Bernhard Goetz at a New York City Subway were already victims when he shot them. His ability to fire away with impunity is simply confirmation of the status of many young blacks in America today. The jury returned a verdict of guilty for a firearms violation, a misdemeanor, but found the act of shooting the four young black men was done without culpability.

One can understand how Goetz could act with impunity in shooting young black men when so many members of the black community are either indifferent to or hopelessly naive about the violence and high death rate all around us.

Every day in the United States, two youths under 18 years of age are murdered by guns and a third is killed accidentally by a firearm — and the rate of slaughter is rising.

The impact of death from killings and firearm accidents has been a significant factor in reducing the life expectancy of blacks in the United States for the second consecutive year, according to federal health statistics. The latest figures available for life expectancy of blacks of both sexes dropped, while life expectancy for whites of both sexes continued to make gains.

For the years 1985 and 1986, the latest for which figures are available, the life expectancy for blacks has dropped from the previous year and there is a 5.6-year gap

between the life expectancy of whites and that of blacks. The leading causes of death during this period, homicides and killings, is often committed by other members of the victim's community and race.

Violence in the black community has gotten out of hand. The probability of a black man being murdered in New York City is greater than was the probability of a U.S. soldier being killed in World War II. Homicide is the leading cause of death for black people between the ages of 15 and 34 in our nation. Blacks are both the victims and the perpetrators of violent crimes.

In 1985, fully one-third of those who committed violent crimes were identified by the victims as black, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In 1986, one-third of those under the age of 18 who were arrested for violent crimes in urban areas were black.

Violence by blacks has had a twofold impact in the black community: an increase in the black death rate and a decrease in the number of black males in the community because they become part of the prison population.

Two areas of special concern are deaths resulting from police confrontations and black suicides. The death rate of blacks at the hands of police officers is on the rise. There has been an 8 percent increase, the first increase since 1980, of blacks being killed or injured as a result of a confrontation with police officers. While the death rate for such killings increased 5 percent for whites, it went up 15 percent for blacks, according to current statistics.

As to suicides, high-achieving black students are at particular risk, according to the recent poll. As many as 10 percent of black high-achievers have admitted they had attempted suicide. Added to the violence and

death rate, these additional factors should heighten our concern.

Community awareness is not enough; we must have a national commitment to reduce the rising rate of violence and death of black Americans. But the solution must emanate from the black community. United action to prevent the causes of death and violence will serve to strengthen our "community" through unity and will result in making our communities better places to work and to live.

Tougher sentences for criminals is not the answer to reduce crime and violence. We have seen the results of America becoming tougher on crime and criminals. Strict sentencing laws — use a gun, go to jail; sell drugs, go to jail — have tripled the inmate population in our nation. The United States now incarcerates a greater percentage of its population than any other industrial country except the Soviet Union and South Africa. But has life in our communities become safer or better?

Our nation now requires new prison beds at the rate of a thousand every week. Communities throughout the nation balk at paying for more prisons, or letting them be built in their communities. This has resulted in overcrowded prisons and prisoner unrest. Budget pressures and community resistance to new jails has resulted in our nation's many furlough programs and work-release alternatives.

Willie Horton, made famous by the TV ad aired on behalf of George Bush, was released because we have a nation that is concerned with punishment as a "form without substance."

Tougher sentencing has resulted in our incarcerating more black men than we send to our colleges and universities. In a time of

scarce public funds, could we not make better use of the billions of dollars spent on tougher sentences for more productive purposes?

A study conducted over 20 years ago found that civil-rights activity decreased black crime. It noted that major crime in Washington, D.C., and Harlem (the two locations for which data was collected from newspaper accounts) had decreased in the days around the march on Washington on Aug. 28, 1963. One precinct in Harlem reported no crime at all for that day.

Such anecdotal data is inadequate, but it is also clear and consistent in the minds of most blacks that crime by blacks is dramatically reduced during periods of organized community action, as demonstrated by the civil-rights movement during the 1960s. The conclusion is clear: Community unity will prevent violence and reduce needless deaths.

Many leaders today are attempting to reintroduce the concept of community to black Americans. Some recommend that we begin calling ourselves "African-Americans" in order to develop greater cohesiveness within our communities. Others are seeking political power to restore confidence in the government and political process as a way to improve the lives of black Americans.

I support all those who are working to reduce the violence and deaths in our community. But the job is not for others; it is for us to commit ourselves to the task of making our own communities safe and improving the quality and extending the lifespan of our young people. All Americans, both black and white, should commit themselves to this goal.

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GERARD A. PATTERSON

Would Caller ID thwart the telephone intruders?

As it seeks to offer a new service that will help its subscribers cope with long-winded solicitors as well as heavy-breathed of another sort, Bell of Pennsylvania has gotten itself in another awkward position.

The Caller ID system that Bell is trying to get the Public Utility Commission to approve would project the number from which a call is being made for the receiver to recognize and decide whether or not to respond.

Presumably, with this sorting service, if the number isn't familiar, the person dialed won't pick up the phone or bother to ring back. Wanna bet?

But while ready to charge its customers \$6.50 a month for this intrusion protection, Bell for years also has been playing the other end of the line, so to speak, by offering training in the art of telemarketing. That is, how to use the telephone as a selling tool.

While pointing out that Bell may soon be getting out of this business (not for any conflict of interests but because of the sheer economics of it), Doug Henson, an assistant staff marketing supervisor, says it has always been the utility's practice to show people how to use the telephone in an unobjectionable fashion. Bell stresses telephone courtesy in its courses, with the first no-no being don't call people after 9 o'clock at night.

Of course, the window of time in which

consumer-marketing calls can be made with some reasonable hope of catching someone at home has narrowed with the proliferation of two-income families. Unfortunately, during the small segment of time in which someone can be found at home and awake, dinner is usually being served. Consequently, what has evolved as the prime calling time for reaching consumers, according to Henson, is Saturday afternoons during the winter months.

When the weather is more pleasant, people are out of the house so Saturdays can be scratched then, too, for telephonic sales-pitching.

But telemarketing and the weather are linked not just in terms of the likelihood of finding people trapped indoors but also in finding them receptive. Notice how the people who seal leaky basements seem always to call to offer assistance after a heavy rainstorm, when the problem, if it exists, is one of immediate concern.

In Henson's view, the inappropriateness of calls can be as irritating as the hour they are made and better targeting of the market is encouraged by Bell in its training. When he cited as an example the calls he has received from dating services even though he's been married for 11 years, his interviewer was able to cite the requests he receives to subscribe to a newspaper he has worked for longer than that.

More and more, however, the individual is

being electronically excluded from telemarketing and phone-soliciting transactions. With automatic dialing, calls are put through in high volume. When a connection is made, a prerecorded message is delivered. But now, in defense against such programming, more and more subscribers have turned to recording machines and don't even bother picking up their phones when they ring. So what's the result? We have recordings being played for recorders. No more walking fingers, no more unanswered calls, no more guilt over hanging up rudely on some poor soul just trying to make a living.

The value that should be placed on a piece of correspondence is a very subjective matter, closely related to personal interests and involvement. As we flip through those stacks of mailed appeals from causes of varying worthiness, as rapidly as we might disperse a deck of cards, we have to remind ourselves that so-called "junk mail" isn't anything of the sort for the person paying the postage.

To him, the countless tons of greeting cards with quickly forgotten verses and wish-you-were-here picture postcards overburdening the postal distribution system are far less important and little more sincere.

To an extent, consumer telemarketing people are looked upon as the makers of "junk calls," which causes no little resentment among people like Ron Webber of Orange, Conn., the former president of the

American Telemarketing Association.

Mr. Webber is very quick to point out that this is a \$100 billion a year business and employs some 2 million persons, either on the calling or receiving end (when such activity is looked upon broadly enough to encompass business as well as consumer sales calls and carrying on such transactions by phone as making hotel and airline reservations).

Telemarketing activity grows because it's economical and it works. What makes it so effective? "Who isn't going to pick up a ringing telephone?" Webber asks in reply.

It's this attitude that leaves him clearly untroubled by such a service as Caller ID. "Someone sees a number he doesn't recognize. Are you going to tell me that he is not going to call it. Suppose it's an emergency? Suppose it's the bank calling to say his account is overdrawn? He doesn't know. He's got to call back."

Webber may be right, that people will still respond even if the number — if you will excuse the expression — doesn't ring a bell. But, in obtaining the number, at least they may be able to gain the satisfaction of striking back at some equally inconvenient moment if indeed it turns out to be another unwelcome intruder.

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