

**Rising African
American Leaders:
Challenges for a New
Generation**



Themes from a Town Hall Meeting

**Sponsored by the Joint Center for
Political and Economic Studies**

Prepared by Michael Wenger

Founded in 1970, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies informs and illuminates the nation's major public policy debates through research, analysis, and information dissemination in order to: improve the socioeconomic status of black Americans, expand their effective participation in the political and public policy arenas, and promote communications and relationships across racial and ethnic lines to strengthen the nation's pluralistic society.

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PREFACE

On April 20, 2005, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, with support from the AT&T Foundation, hosted a town hall meeting entitled “Rising African American Leaders: Challenges for a New Generation.” Moderated by Joe Madison, host of “Mornings with Madison The Black Eagle” on WOL-AM radio, the discussion focused on how today’s challenges differ from those confronted by African American leaders in the years immediately following the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. While there was general agreement that conditions have significantly improved, there was also agreement that racism still permeates our institutions and that rising African American leaders confront far more complex challenges than their white counterparts. The panelists included six emerging leaders and two “seasoned” leaders (indicated by *). Four of the panelists were from the private sector and four were from the public sector. They were:

- Honorable Jennette B. Bradley (R), Ohio Treasurer of State
- Susan E. Chapman, Senior Vice President & Chief Strategy Officer, Citigroup Realty Services
- Honorable Artur G. Davis (D-AL), Member of Congress, 7th Congressional District of Alabama
- Dennis Dowdell, Jr., Executive Director, Institute for Leadership Development & Research, Executive Leadership Council*
- Honorable Glenn F. Ivey (D), State’s Attorney, Prince George’s County, Maryland
- Lydia G. Mallett, Vice President for Diversity, Tyco International
- Eddie N. Williams, President Emeritus, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*
- Xavier D. Williams, Vice President, Sales Management, AT&T Government Solutions

Following an engaging and thought-provoking discussion among the panelists, the moderator turned to the audience for comments. Key audience discussants included Roderick D. Gillum, vice president for corporate responsibility & diversity for the General Motors Corporation; Dr. Andrew F. Brimmer, president of Brimmer & Company, Inc., and the first African American to serve on the Federal Reserve Board; and Rufus McKinney, retired vice president for national public affairs for the Southern California Gas Company and Pacific Enterprises, and author of *Beating the Odds*. Mr. Gillum and Dr. Brimmer are members of the Joint Center’s Board of Governors.

This town hall meeting was a significant component of a Joint Center project that is exploring the challenges that face a new generation of African American leaders in both the public and private sectors. Through this project, the Joint Center seeks to identify the kinds of capacities and insights these individuals will need to provide effective leadership in the context of rapid

societal change. The project builds on previous research conducted by the Joint Center. Products of this earlier work, authored by Joint Center senior research associate David A. Bositis, include *Diverging Generations: The Transformation of African American Policy Views* and *Changing of the Guard: Generational Differences Among Black Elected Officials*, as well as a report on a Joint Center/*Fortune Magazine* survey. These and other Joint Center publications are available online at www.jointcenter.org.



Forum on “Rising African American Leaders: Challenges for a New Generation.”

April 20, 2005, at the Hilton Washington Hotel in Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2005 marks the 40th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. When John Lewis led marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on “Bloody Sunday,” there were only a few hundred black elected officials in the country. African Americans in the Deep South faced impenetrable barriers to voting—the poll tax, literacy tests, the grandfather clause, and physical and economic intimidation. But the courage and sacrifice of John Lewis and the thousands of marchers, black and white, who strode with him from Selma to the Capitol Building in Montgomery, inspired the legislation that ended these pernicious practices, opened the ballot boxes to African Americans, and set the stage for the election of African Americans to offices at virtually every level of government.

In the intervening years, progress has been undeniable. The Congressional Black Caucus now has more than 40 members, including U.S. Representative John Lewis. U.S. Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) is the third African American to be elected to the U.S. Senate since 1965, following Ed Brooke (R-MA) and Carole Mosely Braun (D-IL). Doug Wilder has been elected governor of Virginia, and most of our major cities, including New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and New Orleans, as well as Richmond, the Capital of the old Confederacy, have elected African American mayors. Throughout the country, more than 9,500 black elected officials serve in public office, from the local school board to the state legislature.

Just one year prior to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted. It prohibited discrimination in employment, created the Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and opened the doors of private sector employment to African Americans. The growing African American middle-class, the narrowing of wage gaps between African Americans and whites, and the increasing diversity of the work place testify to the positive changes in access to good jobs that have taken place since 1964. African American CEOs at Merrill-Lynch, American Express, Young and Rubicam, Black Entertainment Television (BET), and Time Warner demonstrate that such access extends to the very top of the corporate ladder.

But today, as new African American leaders emerge in both the public and private sectors, significant challenges remain. On the public side, election results at every level indicate that a significant number of white Americans remain reluctant to vote for an African American candidate, irrespective of the candidate’s qualifications or positions on key issues. On the private side, Joint Center research shows that, while younger black professionals are more optimistic than their elders, a substantial majority of black professionals believes that strong anti-discrimination laws and enforcement remain necessary because many CEOs and senior business executives express little concern about racial discrimination in their companies. According to respondents in a Joint Center survey of black professionals, corporate America remains a somewhat hostile environment and racial discrimination remains a widespread problem.

This town hall meeting explored the challenges that face emerging African American leaders in both the public and private sectors, and participants reflected on what we can learn from the trials and victories of those who have paved the way. How do the challenges for today’s African American public officials differ from those confronted by Dick Hatcher in Gary, Indiana, and Carl Stokes in Cleveland, Ohio, when they became the first African American mayors of major U.S. cities in the late 1960s? What challenges confront African Americans in the private sector as they climb the corporate ladder? Are there differences between the challenges faced by leaders in the public sector and those faced by leaders in the private sector? What are the most effective strategies for confronting these challenges?

THE TOWN HALL MEETING - SETTING THE STAGE

In his report on the results of a Joint Center/*Fortune Magazine* survey (April 1998) of the attitudes of black professionals toward corporate America, David A. Bositis wrote:

“Younger black professionals are more optimistic, self-confident, and positively oriented toward corporate America than their elders. Prior to noting these differences, it is worth remembering that many observers of race in the United States (in all venues) have pointed out that the youthful optimism of young African Americans has often been replaced by cynicism and disappointment as their experiences with racism gradually diminish their earlier hopes.”

The optimism and self-confidence to which Bositis refers is reflected in the growing propensity of African American elected officials to feel free to take differing positions on issues of common concern, and in the continuing advancement of African Americans in the corporate world. Nonetheless, persistent differential treatment based on skin color, extensively documented in both the private and public sectors, must give us pause. Will it lead to the cynicism and disappointment that has overtaken earlier generations of African American leaders or will the lessons learned from the “seasoned” leaders, as well as the personal experiences of this emerging generation of leaders, enable them to surmount this hurdle and strengthen their hopes and aspirations?

THE TOWN HALL MEETING - THE CHALLENGES

In the Joint Center’s April 20th town hall meeting, “Rising African American Leaders: Challenges for a New Generation,” the optimism and self-confidence of younger black professionals to which Bositis refers were clearly visible. The optimism and self-confidence among the panelists, however, were tempered less by cynicism and disappointment, and more by 1) a hard-headed view of the challenges that rising African American leaders continue to confront in a society still plagued by racism; and 2) a determination to learn what they can from those who have preceded them. Eddie Williams stated the challenge in stark terms:

“When we talk about leadership, we are talking a power paradigm. It’s fruitless to romanticize [the continuing struggle for African Americans to attain leadership positions]... It is a political and policy paradigm, and those who fail at it will be challenged and perhaps defeated, in both the corporate and the public sector.”

He concluded the thought by succinctly describing the challenge for “seasoned” leaders:

“...those who are promoted to the top have to continue to reach back and help pull others up.”

This inter-generational responsibility was a common thread throughout the discussion, as panelists elaborated on the continuing challenges confronted by young leaders. These challenges fell into three broad categories:

1. Limited opportunities
2. Conflicts regarding whose interests must be represented
3. Greater scrutiny by white employers and constituents



Eddie N. Williams,
President Emeritus,
Joint Center for Political &
Economic Studies

Limited Opportunities:

Room at the Top

Early in the discussion, the panel confronted the issue of whether there is limited room at the top for African Americans. The issue was framed by Xavier Williams, who expressed the view that “African Americans think that there are limited numbers of opportunities” to rise to positions of power and influence. Referring to corporate America, he said that “a lot of people may feel that until... one black officer moves on, they won’t promote another one.” He did not necessarily believe this to be true—at least not at AT&T, the company for which he works—but he noted that “a lot of people feel that way.” In subsequent comments by others on the panel, however, there seemed to be a strong feeling that corporate leaders more closely scrutinize rising African American leaders than they do rising leaders who are white.



Susan Chapman,
Senior Vice President &
Chief Strategy Officer,
Citigroup Realty Services

In response to a query from the moderator regarding whether the older leadership looks at younger leaders as a threat because of limited room at the top, Dennis Dowdell disagreed. He responded: “...there are so few senior African American corporate executives struggling for survival where they are that they welcome their [younger leaders] arrival into these levels.”

Speaking for the younger leaders, Susan Chapman challenged the notion that “there is this issue between those of us who are younger who are trying to push folks out at the top. In corporate America, we’re just happy to see that they’re there because they just got there. To us, they are an example that we, too, can make it.”

The Dead End

Xavier Williams suggested that one of the ways in which corporations limit opportunities for African Americans is by placing them in staff jobs rather than line jobs. He asserted that it is generally much more difficult to scale the corporate ladder from a staff position, such as diversity officer, than it is from a line position in which one has supervisory responsibilities and a clearer promotional path. Mr. Williams concluded: “Unless I had a clear path out, I would never take a staff job.”

The moderator related this issue to the generational theme of the discussion, as he followed up with Mr. Williams:

“Some young African Americans get a corporate job... and they don’t know the difference between a staff job or a line job. They don’t know because you don’t have that discussion at the dinner table. Who taught you?”

“Fortunately,” Mr. Williams responded, “I did learn some of this at the dinner table. My father always had his own business, so I did learn it there.”

Nonetheless, the point of the moderator’s question was not lost—young African Americans may be at a disadvantage if they do not have mentors or parents who have overcome significant obstacles and are able to pass on relevant knowledge.

In his comments later in the discussion, Dr. Andrew Brimmer reiterated the point that having operational responsibilities is a key to advancement:

“You must have some opportunity to travel about the organization, to learn the nuts and bolts of the operation, and to move up the ladder... you get to the top of the ladder on the basis of performance.”

Blacks in the Board Room

Subsequently, the discussion turned from black employees to black members of Boards of Directors of major corporations. The discussion revealed strong feelings among the panelists regarding the value of having even a single black member on a board. Dennis Dowdell launched the topic by referring to a recent survey conducted by the Executive Leadership Council, which revealed that, among Fortune 500 companies, “there are 5,572 corporate board seats total, of which African Americans only hold 450.” Because many individuals sit on more than one board, however, those 450 seats are held by only 255 individuals.

The moderator recalled a speech given several years ago by the late John Johnson of Johnson Publishing Company (publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet*) in which he declared that he did not want to be the only black person on a corporate Board of Directors because, in the moderator’s words, “when you’re the only black person up there... the decisions are made before you get to the board room because folks have made calls or whatever... and there’s not much influence that you can have.”

Later in the discussion, Roderick Gillum strongly disagreed, citing the role Dr. Leon Sullivan played on the General Motors Board of Directors:

“At the time, when we were closing plants and communities were being impacted, you could always expect Reverend Sullivan to ask the right question... inside the company, he also took it upon himself to have meetings once a year with the heads of every department, and ask them what they were doing about minorities within their department.”

Eddie Williams suggested that individual board members, even if they are the only black board member, can use their position to bring change:

“I’ve been on all kinds of boards. You use that. I’ve told them, I’m tired of being the only black person in the board room. Either bring senior staff in or other board members. You force them to think, and many times, some things begin to happen.”

Mr. Gillum concurred, saying that “if you aren’t there at the time the debate takes place, then you’re of very little value.”

Dr. Lydia Mallett reinforced the views expressed by both Mr. Williams and Mr. Gillum:



Dennis Dowdell,
Executive Director,
Institute for Leadership
Development & Research,
Executive Leadership Council



Roderick Gillum,
Vice President for Corporate
Responsibility & Diversity,
General Motors Corporation

“You hope you’ve got a woman or a person of color on that board who’s going to challenge that corporation to do better... I’ve got two board members on the board at Tyco who ask: how are we doing in terms of diversity, what’s our representation, what’s going on there? They make my job easier.”

Speaking for the African American Community

Approaching the theme of limited opportunities from the perspective of a politician, Representative Artur Davis stated that “there’s a fixation in this country on trying to identify one black at a time... who is going to hold the national stage.” Xavier Williams placed responsibility for this fixation largely on the media, offering the opinion that the media tends to define who the leaders are in the black community.

Treasurer Jennette Bradley expressed the view that this fixation is, in fact, a key impediment to the emergence of new African American leaders:

“We have to allow other people to be representatives and speak on various issues because we don’t have that. That is not a requirement for the majority. There is no one spokesperson for white America... There has to be an opportunity for different voices, and that can be difficult because the media will only focus on that known quantity.”



Jennette Bradley,
Ohio Treasurer of State

The State-Wide Problem

State’s Attorney Glenn Ivey spoke of “a sense of restricted options and possibilities,” referring to the reality that, while African Americans can get elected to offices in predominantly African American jurisdictions, they are rarely able to win a state-wide office because of the continuing reluctance of white voters to vote for an African American candidate.

Representative Davis supported Mr. Ivey’s assertion:

“...if you are a 35-year-old white man in America who is, let’s say, a member of the House, and you’re extremely talented, charismatic, and have all the political skill in the world, everybody presumes you’re going to run for governor or senator at some point, and everybody assumes, if you get lucky, you might be President... If you are a 35- or 40-year-old African American politician in this country, with the same exact level of talent, there’s an assumption that only one person of your generation can make it.”

He concluded:

“The reality is that there is no shortage of talented black politicians in this country—male and female.”

Seeking the Same Office

Unfortunately, as Representative Davis pointed out, the assumption that only one black person can make it often manifests itself as pressure for blacks to avoid competing against one another for the same office and risking a division of the supposedly monolithic black vote. He cited the example of the upcoming battle for the seat of retiring Maryland senator Paul Sarbanes:

“...there are people in Maryland right now who are saying to Glenn Ivey and to Elijah Cummings: you cannot run for the U.S. Senate because there’s another black man [Kweisi Mfume] who said he was going to run before you—and how dare you divide the black community. That’s corrosive, in my opinion.”

Later, however, Representative Davis did note some hopeful signs, predicting that “barring a completely unexpected turn of events in the next nine months, Ohio will become the first state in this country to have an election [for governor] between a black Republican, Ken Blackwell, and a black Democrat, Michael Coleman, mayor of Columbus.” Referring to the Maryland senatorial contest, he noted that, “in a state that has around 20 percent or less black [population] statewide... any one of [three black men—Kweisi Mfume, Michael Steele, and Glenn Ivey] could be elected.”



Representative Artur Davis (D-AL)

When the Applause Dies

State’s Attorney Ivey noted that few opportunities for blacks who hold public office carry over to the time after their tenure in office has ended:

“[Whites who leave Congress] take million-dollar jobs as lobbyists or as directors for corporations and the like. Very few African Americans get those kinds of opportunities when they leave public service.”

Conflicts:

Pleasing All the Constituencies — The Private Sector

The moderator used the University of Michigan affirmative action cases heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003 to challenge the panel to explore the dilemma faced by African American leaders who may feel torn between their commitment to equal justice and the necessity of pleasing their corporate constituencies. Referring to decisions faced by corporations regarding whether to file amicus briefs in the cases, he asked what a black executive should do when he or she has benefited from affirmative action, but has to confront a corporate power structure that says “this case is not our battle.”

Xavier Williams noted that there are three constituencies that corporate leaders have to worry about: “the shareholders, your customers, and your own employees.” If he was asked for his recommendation by his corporate employer, he felt that he would “have to look at our constituencies and figure out what’s best for our company.”

Noting that, as an attorney in private practice, he had represented Microsoft, State’s Attorney Ivey expressed the view that “you just have to figure out how to frame the argument in a way that makes sense from the corporate perspective.” He spoke of taking advantage of the power of the media in framing the argument:



Glen Ivey,
State’s Attorney,
Prince George’s County, Maryland

“You know what you want him to do, and you say, you need to do this because if you don’t, have you heard of the Tom Joyner Show? Do you know who Tavis Smiley is?”

Mr. Dowdell observed that members of the Executive Leadership Council had convinced “a lot of companies to file amicus briefs by articulating a rationale for supporting the brief, acknowledging that customers might be lost... but that the decision was in the best interest of the communities in which they serve.”

The scope of the discussion was broadened by Susan Chapman, who maintained:

“In corporate America, we get faced with these issues every day. It’s not even the big issues, but it’s almost a test that we have to go through on a regular basis. When something happens in the community that affects us—being black folks, the first person they come to is you... You have to be on point every day... you have to set the example about what you believe in.”

She credited the Executive Leadership Council with crystallizing her philosophy:

“At the end of the day, you have to make a decision about whether or not your morals and values match that of the organization in which you work. If they don’t, then you need to go find someplace that does.”

Responding to a challenge that she might be placing her advancement in the company in jeopardy, she declared:

“We all make choices. Some people’s motivation in life is about money, and about the power, and about the title; and for other people, it’s not... the fact [remains] that black folks are a diverse group of people, that we are just as different as everybody else, and that we all have different motivations for why we do the things we do.”

Later in the discussion, Ms. Chapman left no doubt about where she stands when she asserted:

“...I’m one of those kids who didn’t grow up during the civil rights movement, but I understand the struggle. And I also understand what my responsibility is to my community... everybody knows Susan is always going to raise the flag when there’s an issue that relates to black folks.”

She affirmed, however, that this did not necessarily have to be done in a confrontational manner:

“Now, let’s be clear. I don’t necessarily walk in the door and say: blah, blah, blah. Sometimes it’s around the corner, and sometimes it’s under the table, and sometimes it’s sending a little e-mail... It’s about changing the consciousness of how people think about you and what you represent... in every company I’ve ever worked for, they’re not used to dealing with African Americans who are smart and bright.”

Pleasing All the Constituencies — The Public Sector

In the public sector, the challenge arises in a somewhat different manner. Representative Davis articulated this challenge in his discussion of the demands placed on African American politicians who represent predominantly white constituencies:

“You have one vision that says that you have a special obligation to be an ombudsman, an advocate for black people, regardless of the majority constituency. And there’s another viewpoint that says... you’ve got to represent everybody.”

After acknowledging that “good people have different answers to that question,” Representative Davis made his point of view clear, noting his response to a black constituent who accused him of being insufficiently strong in representing only black people:

“I told him point blank—what about my white colleague in the third district who has a 35 percent black population? Do you want him to just represent white people?... We’re not going to win with that game... we’re in the minority in most places.”

Treasurer Bradley expressed the view that an elected official will never receive 100 percent approval from his or her constituency, but that, “from a leadership perspective, the opportunity that an elected official has is to articulate why” he or she takes a particular position on a particular issue. “It’s the burden of leadership,” she concluded.

The opinion that this is largely an example of generational change was given voice by the moderator:

“Here’s where I’m sensing that the generation theme comes in. Your predecessor was the first black to be elected, which meant that your predecessor was part of a generation that was denied power... even though they made up the majority of the voting constituency... So he comes out of a generation where he got his power because he stood up and said it is time for black people to have power in Congress... when John Conyers got elected, [he] was not just the representative of the district of Michigan—with Charlie Diggs, they were black America’s congressmen; and before them, Adam Clayton Powell. Now it is different because it’s a new time and a new generation.”

Expressing a different opinion, Representative Davis claimed:

“It’s not about generations... What I think has happened in America is that we’ve become a more and more diverse country. The nature of power is changing. You have all kinds of claimants for power now. So I don’t think we can get caught up on this idea that says our obligation is to deliver and to use our power for one constituency because, more often than not, if that’s the logic that’s applied, you’ll be on the losing end of the stick.”

The Condi Rice Strategy?

State’s Attorney Ivey raised a somewhat different challenge for African American political leaders: how to avoid being used to make moderate whites comfortable with a white candidate. He used the example of Maryland Republican gubernatorial candidate Robert Ehrlich’s choice of African American Michael Steele to run on his ticket for lieutenant governor in 2002. Mr. Ivey stated:

“I don’t think [the choice of Steele] was ever intended to get the black vote. I think what



Joe Madison, the moderator

it was intended to do was two things. One was to calm black folks down... So black folks didn't get the turnout you would have. Secondly, I think the real targeted group was moderate whites because they looked at Ehrlich and said: 'How bad can it be? A black got to be lieutenant governor. It's okay. I don't have to feel guilty about voting for this guy.'"

Representative Davis took this point a step further in his response to a question posed by the moderator: What is the Condi Rice strategy?

"If Condoleezza Rice is on the Republican ticket in 2008," Representative Davis said, "it will not be because Bill Frist, or Giuliani, or John McCain think they're going to get 35 percent of the black vote; they know better than that. It will be because it's a signal to suburban whites that this right wing guy is not so bad; after all, they're giving us a first black vice president."

Greater Scrutiny:

Do African American Leaders Have to be Twice as Good?

At the very beginning of the discussion, Mr. Dowdell confronted the issue of whether African Americans are held to a higher standard and scrutinized more closely than their white colleagues:



Lydia Mallett,
Vice President for Diversity,
Tyco International

"There's an extraordinarily higher level of scrutiny for African Americans at certain high levels, even mid-level managers, than there is for white corporate folk and white leaders. That level of scrutiny... is very different from our white counterparts. If you listen to the African American CEOs of corporate America, the level of scrutiny for them is higher than it is for white CEOs. The level of scrutiny for senior corporate officers is higher than it is for our white counterparts. I think that level of scrutiny also applies to leadership generally in African American communities."

Later in the discussion, Dr. Lydia Mallett succinctly explained how such heightened scrutiny manifests itself:

"We still have to be twice as good as our colleagues."

She noted that, along with the reality that "the standard is still higher for African Americans in terms of performance... there's a certain benefit of the doubt given to young white men that they can be stretched in their next assignment. There's still a struggle around making the playing field level, where the standards are the same for everyone."

THE TOWN HALL MEETING - ANSWERING THE CHALLENGES

Many of the challenges that emerging African American leaders confront arise from the ignorance and/or insensitivity—rather than the blatant racism—of white people. Yet, there is no denying that racism remains an important issue. When the moderator rhetorically asked whether race is still an issue in America, the simple answer from the panelists was: “It is.”

While they were realistic about the challenges they confront, however, all of the panelists seemed optimistic about discussing ways in which to answer the challenges:

1. Find mentors and sponsors
2. Perform with integrity at a high quality level
3. Look at the broader picture of social issues that confront the African American community

Finding Mentors and Sponsors:

The Role of Mentors

Dr. Brimmer, who has served on 29 boards and earned a range of honors over the years, provided a vivid personal example of the importance of having a mentor to help one fashion a successful career. He described how Luther Hodges, President Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Commerce, gave him visibility with the president, put him in charge of important activities in the Department of Commerce, and introduced him to countless leaders in the private sector. He credited Secretary Hodges with paving the way for his subsequent success and prominence in the financial field.

Mentoring up-and-coming African American corporate executives is a key role of the Executive Leadership Council and, according to Ms. Chapman, an important responsibility of senior executives:

“You have some senior executives who are more or less involved in mentoring, coaching, and sharing their experiences with younger black professionals.”

She gave credit to the Executive Leadership Council for their role:

“There are certain things in life that change your life. My relationship with the Executive Leadership Council changed my life. I have relationships with senior people where I can pick up the phone and call them and say, ‘Can I just tell you what happened yesterday? Help me work this out.’”

But, as Dr. Mallett acknowledged, not all senior executives take on this responsibility:

“In the roles that I’ve sat in, I’ve tried to explain to young professionals why a particular executive is not accessible. [I tell them:] You have to be with the ones who are, and everybody is not going to get on our bandwagon and be there for us. It’s just the reality of it. Everybody is an individual, and if they’re not there, then they just move on to the person who will be there.”



Joe Madison and
Dr. Andrew Brimmer



Xavier Williams,
Vice President,
Sales Management,
AT&T Government Solutions

In this context, Xavier Williams spoke about how the older generation can help:

“One of the things is that there’s a generation before us that teaches us how to exercise power... I don’t have to make a big to-do about something—it just might be: let me send a note to Lydia over in corporate diversity to say, ‘there’s this opening coming up and I know three candidates that might not make the list, so can you make sure these people get inserted into the process?’”

The Difference Between a Mentor and a Sponsor

Mr. Dowdell suggested that there might be a difference between having a mentor and having a sponsor:

“I didn’t have a mentor because I was the only one for so long in my first company. When I reported to the CEO, that was it. But there’s something more important in corporate America to mention: it’s also necessary to have a sponsor. If you only have a mentor, oftentimes we look up too much—and not up and down—for mentoring. You also need a sponsor. That sponsor is someone who isn’t necessarily identified, but has your best interest in mind. Sometimes we get too focused on [mentors]... It limits his or her ability to influence my career if it is too well known that he or she is acting as my mentor. A sponsor is someone who pushes it through and you don’t know that they’re there... oftentimes you need that balance.”

When State’s Attorney Ivey observed, “that happens politically, too,” the moderator elaborated:

“So maybe in terms of this discussion of this passing of the torch, what young African Americans are saying is that we need more sponsors, whether they’re known or unknown... I may not know Glenn, but I may know his reputation, and I may say to a Democratic head in Maryland, ‘he’s got a good head on his shoulders; you guys need to take him seriously.’”

Performance:



Rufus McKinney addressing the panel

Earning Your Stripes

The moderator’s elaboration evoked a quick response from Representative Davis about the importance of earning sponsors:

“You won’t make it in politics without that. But let me say one thing: I want sponsors, but I hope I’m earning them.”

Xavier Williams echoed that sentiment:

“I hope I’m earning sponsorship. Of course, I want it. But my hope that I’m earning it is the big thing. In our generation, I think a lot of people hope we’re earning it. Sometimes everyone thinks we just want it.”

Mr. Dowdell had referred to performance in the private sector even more emphatically earlier in the discussion:

“You work your way up in corporate America by doing the job.”

This same theme surfaced again during Dr. Brimmer's remarks:

“In the corporate world, you [have to] earn your stripes... virtually every major corporation promotes from within. Virtually no senior person makes it up short of four or five years. There's an apprenticeship, and then you get to the top of the ladder on the basis of performance.”

Credentials vs. Performance

Rufus McKinney focused his comments on the importance of performance as well, and warned about relying on credentials:

“Credentials do not equal performance in the corporate world. Credentials are just the ticket to be considered. I think this is almost immutable, whether it's in corporate America or whether it's in elective politics—you first have got to deliver the goods to the folks who put you in the job that you have.”

Mr. McKinney had a warning with regard to mentors and sponsors as well:

“If you are a sponsor or mentor, you are put under tremendous pressure if the person you want to mentor or to sponsor isn't delivering the goods at the bottom line.”

Performance is not only important to an individual's advancement, but it also enhances an employee's credibility to speak up on behalf of others. When the moderator questioned Ms. Chapman about her comfort with speaking up on behalf of others, given her assertion that “everybody knows Susan's always going to raise the flag when there's an issue that relates to black folks,” she responded:

“I'm comfortable doing it because I have the power and influence in my organization, and I produce. So I have the minimum requirements for the organization.”

The Political Environment

State's Attorney Ivey had a different perspective on performance and accomplishment as a public official:

“In politics, it seems to be a very different environment than when I started in the 1980s—for Democrats in particular because in Washington we don't control anything anymore. So a lot of avenues that led to a Voting Rights Act, a Fair Housing Act, the Civil Rights Act—the stuff that made me want to go into politics to start with—isn't available in the same way... I think one of the challenges for leadership currently is to figure out new avenues through which to accomplish the same types of objectives.”

The Broader Picture:

The Changing Struggle

For African Americans on the rise, however, it is not only about the bottom line; it is about the broader picture of the social issues that the community confronts. The moderator approached this matter from a generational standpoint:

“The thing that really attracted me to the civil rights movement was not so much the accomplishment—what attracted me was the struggle. So is this a generational thing? Because there are older people here who are saying: ‘It’s the struggle that I wanted to be part of’ ... my own son wants to be part of the accomplishment.”

Ms. Chapman vividly described the generational difference:

“My mother grew up in rural Alabama. She didn’t have shoes until she was seven. That wasn’t me. I always had clothes on my back. I always had food on the table. I traveled around the world before I even graduated from high school. The struggle is very different. It doesn’t mean it minimizes it; it’s just different. For us, we still have to be twice as good as our colleagues. We still have to compete. We still have to go to the right schools. It’s just different.”

While acknowledging the struggle of the older generation, Treasurer Bradley felt that we should not “hold the younger generation hostage to the struggle because that’s why [we] struggled. We struggled so that our sons and daughters would have this opportunity. They see life differently because they didn’t go to segregated schools.”

“I look at young women now, and they don’t remember when women were relegated to being a social worker or a teacher,” Treasurer Bradley continued. “I take great pride in that women can look at me, or some of these other women on this panel, and say, ‘I can be the CEO’—because their minds are freer because of the opportunities that emerged from the struggle.”

Today’s Issues

In response, Representative Davis spoke to the struggles of the current generation of young leaders:

“There are a lot of struggles that are going on under the exterior of American life today and that are more complicated than race. Yet they have a racial aspect to them. The lack of equitably funded schools in this country—the fact that schools in this country that have predominantly African American populations are typically not as well-funded as those with suburban, predominantly white populations—that’s a major problem because public education, which used to be a leveling instrument in our society, is today just another reinforcement of social division. Right now, there are major health care disparities based on race in this country. Black people are getting sick and dying from things that you shouldn’t have to die from. We’re getting diseases at rates much greater than other populations. If you want to find a great struggle for our generation to take on, it’s leveling these disparities.”

State's Attorney Ivey added to the list of issues:

“Take black-on-black homicide, an issue that did not exist before. Everyone on this panel—we had the outdoor commodes and all of those kinds of things. We made progress. These are things my kids can't even imagine. At the same time, there are things happening in my kids' generation that I couldn't have imagined, and the violence piece is one of them. Yes, there are certainly many African Americans doing better than we were before, but in some instances we're doing worse.”

The moderator brought the meeting to a close by recounting a discussion he had had with the sister of Vivian Malone, the first African American student to graduate from the University of Alabama during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s:

“She said to me: if the segregationists of their time had sat down to create some of the voids that we have in our community now—the struggle that the younger generation is facing now—they couldn't have come up with a better plan than what we're seeing with education, what we're seeing with AIDS, what we're seeing with health care. These are, in essence, the civil rights issues of this younger generation. And, like the older generation, they're going to have to find out what's going to work best to solve these issues. But it also means that the seasoned leaders—the sages—have got to be there to provide guidance, to show light, and to point out where mistakes might be made.”

Michael R. Wenger is a program consultant at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. He previously directed the Joint Center's NABRE (Network of Alliances Bridging Race and Ethnicity) program. Prior to coming to the Joint Center, he served as Deputy Director for Outreach and Program Development for President Clinton's Initiative on Race.

The Panelists

Jennette B. Bradley became Ohio's 45th Treasurer of State on January 3, 2005. In November of 2002, she became the first African American woman to be elected as Lieutenant Governor in the nation's history. She holds a bachelor's degree from Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, and an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio.

Susan E. Chapman joined Citigroup Corporate Realty Services as Chief Strategy Officer in December, 2004. Prior to joining Citigroup, she served as director of Global Real Estate and Global Procurement for Level 3 Communications, Inc. She holds a masters degree in business administration in real estate and urban land economics from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, a masters degree in regional planning from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a bachelor of science in engineering from Vanderbilt University.

Honorable Artur Davis was first elected to represent Alabama's 7th Congressional District in 2002. Before being elected to Congress, Mr. Davis served as an Assistant United States Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama and practiced law in the private sector. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University and cum laude from Harvard Law School.

Dennis Dowdell, Jr., is the executive director of the Executive Leadership Council's Institute for Leadership Development and Center for Strategic Research. He previously was the president of the National Association of Black Automotive Suppliers. He also has held senior executive positions in human resources with the Henry Ford Health System and the American National Can Company, and spent eight years as an attorney with the U.S. Department of Labor. He graduated from Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, and from the Cleveland State University College of Law.

Honorable Glenn F. Ivey was elected State's Attorney for Prince George's County, Maryland, in 2002. He is a former assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, has worked on Capitol Hill for Congressman John Conyers, Senator Paul Sarbanes, and former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, and was a partner at the Washington, D.C., law firm of Preston, Gates, Ellis & Rouvelas, Meeds. He graduated with honors from Princeton University and earned his law degree from Harvard Law School.

Lydia G. Mallett is vice president of diversity for Tyco International (US), Inc. Prior to joining Tyco, she was the chief diversity officer for General Mills. She has also been a director of the Organization Effectiveness and Development consulting practice of the Harbridge House Division of Coopers & Lybrand, and an assistant professor at the University of Michigan Business School. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology, a masters degree in labor/industrial relations, and both masters and Ph.D. degrees in social psychology from Michigan State University.

Eddie N. Williams is president emeritus of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. He is also president and CEO of Eddie Williams and Associates. From 1972 to 2004, he served as president of the Joint Center. Prior to coming to the Joint Center, he was vice president for Public Affairs and director of the Center for Policy Study at the University of Chicago. He has also held positions with the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the U.S. Department of State. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois and holds honorary doctorate degrees from five universities.

Xavier D. Williams is the sales vice president for AT&T Government Solutions. In his fourteen years with AT&T, he has held progressively more responsible positions, including vice president of human resources training. He holds a bachelor of science in business administration from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and a masters of business administration from the University of Pittsburgh.

The Moderator

Joe Madison is the host of "Mornings with Madison The Black Eagle" on WOL-AM on the Radio One Talk Network, and is nationally syndicated on XM Satellite One, The Power, the first 24-hour African American talk radio network. He has served as executive director of the Detroit NAACP, as director of the national NAACP Political Action Department, and as chairman for the NAACP Image Awards. He has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

About the Joint Center

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan research and public policy institution. Founded in 1970 by black intellectuals and professionals to provide training and technical assistance to newly elected black officials, the Joint Center is recognized today as one of the nation's premier think tanks on a broad range of public policy issues of concern to African Americans and other communities of color.

The history of the Joint Center has not only mirrored the progress that African Americans have made since the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, but has also mirrored the nation's political and socioeconomic progress over the last three decades. When the Joint Center first opened its doors, there were 1,469 black elected officials (BEOs). There are now over 9,000 BEOs in the United States.

Increasing black political participation formed the foundation of much of the Joint Center's work during the 1970s and 1980s. As the civil rights era gave way to the era of "economic rights," however, the Joint Center signaled its expanding focus on job creation and workforce development, changing its name to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Its principal areas of work now include political participation, economic advancement, and health policy. The Joint Center stands primed to continue to drive the nation's public policy discussions with independent and reliable research and analysis. To learn more about the Joint Center, please visit our website at www.jointcenter.org or call 202-789-3500.

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