

Source: CAPE TIMES

Date: 09-Mar-2005

Topic: 05

Ref No: 435



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ID: 03193646-01 Source Page: 11

What have the privileged judge and mayor done to lead by good example?

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THE MAYOR of Cape Town received considerable coverage in the media for her comments that the Mother City still reflected a white, colonial aura that was out-of-touch with the rest of the country.

The Judge President of the Cape High Court has enjoyed anguished comment from inside and outside his profession about racism at the bar. It is hard to believe that after the celebrated 10 years of democracy, prominent black people still complain about being undermined, ridiculed and even ignored by white South Africans.

There can be little question that race and racism still figure prominently in the experiences of black South Africans.

As a black person whose roots lie long and deep in the Western Cape, I am always stunned by two things about this physically beautiful province. The first thing that amazes me is how white, English and Afrikaner arrogance unquestioningly dominate the provincial landscape.

Spend a day at the Vineyard Hotel in Claremont listening to the fake-nobility accents of the English dominant class and you understand perfectly why that province attracts the Thatchers of this world and those who find it perfectly "natural" to overthrow an African state as in the days of yore.

Or spend a day at Stellenbosch University and you begin to understand what convenient power the flag of the Afrikaans language still wields

in retaining the racial identity and culture of that institution irrespective of what happens elsewhere in the country.

The second thing that intrigues me is the way in which black people in the Western Cape (and particularly those comfortable with the label "coloured") adore white presence and pursue white favour. And this is where my diatribe really begins.

In her courageous book, *The End of Blackness*, Debra Dickerson makes two arguments - that the black elite needs to stop blaming others for its predicament and to begin to ask why - despite benefiting from the largesse of American society - they still constantly cry foul; and that the reason for such self-questioning behaviour is that black people need to "give up" on

the capacity of white power and privilege to be sensible in the face of racism and inequality.

I agree with her first argument but refuse to be drawn into a reverse racism that does not believe in the inherent humanity of all people and our capacity, as such, to find, confront and love each other in a world filled with hatred, suspicion and the frightening capacity for self-annihilation.

While Dickerson's argument might find some resonance in American society where blacks remain a minority, I cannot understand such rage in a country where black people not only constitute an overwhelming demographic majority, but also effectively control all the major organs of state power and, increasingly, of leadership in almost every aspect of

national life. What then is going on here?

The question I have for the Mayor of Cape Town is this: agreed, there is racism and inequality, but what has your leadership done to enable that province, and indeed the country, to confront and overcome such iniquity?

To the Judge President, the question is similar: you are not a magistrate but a Judge President ... what have you as a senior, respected leader of the bench done to counter and transform such behaviour?

I am sorry, but the black people who are the real victims are those without the status or capacity to speak up against white privilege and authority - not the growing base of black privileged, middle class leaders and managers who benefit in very vis-

ible ways from our new democracy.

If you are a leader (such as mayors and judge presidents), why not enforce your authority in the workplace? And what better way to do that than to demonstrate superior ethics and commitment? Than to inspire, through personal example, the true meaning of non-racism and affirmation in the way you lead others, and lead your life? Than to instruct those who report to you, or work under you, about the kinds of values and behaviour consonant with a decent life and a democratic society? And then to take action against those who refuse or resist inspiration or instruction?

The black middle and professional classes are not victims; they have at their disposal some very powerful means for living and requiring decen-

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cy from their white (and black) colleagues.

What the judge or the mayor's lament does, is to cast serious doubt on their willingness, if not capacity, to lead against the grain.

It also makes citizens unsure about whether South Africans can expect fairness, even-handedness, maturity and self-restraint from our leaders. We start this country on a dangerous and slippery slope when a minority of whites becomes the enemy for our impotence as leaders.

The crisis in Zimbabwe is not simply a crisis of who owns the land; it is, in the first and last instance, a crisis of leadership.

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