Concepts of a Black Conservative: Candid Political Incorrectness

Reviewed by Deon D. Colvin

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What should Black Americans do to improve their condition in America? Black conservative Connie A. Miller, Sr. sheds light on this question and other important subjects in his thought provoking metanarrative. According to Miller, he wrote the book because he "was inspired by the need for Black conservatives to be heard in America" (p. 12). But Miller is not your run of the mill conservative. Instead of endless streams of detached theoretical moralizing, Miller uses his life experiences as a backdrop for his policy recommendations. What Miller gives the reader is a stunning version of Black conservatism where traditional conservative anathemas such as affirmative action and civil rights lawsuits receive a ringing endorsement. In the process, Miller provides original policy recommendations (a Black legal defense fund) and takes politically incorrect positions (Hispanics are racist toward Blacks) as he builds toward addressing the age-old question of what African Americans should call themselves. In all, *Concepts of a Black Conservative* is a jaw dropping, nine-chapter diatribe that may serve as the opening salvo in the reconstruction of Black conservatism in America.

In Part I, titled "Early Childhood Experiences," Miller revisits his life from birth to preteen in East Austin, Texas. He takes the reader back to a heavenly Black world composed of Black grade schools, Black barbershops, a Black theater, Black movies, a Black DJ, and Black radio shows such as *Amos 'n Andy*. In Miller's segregated South, young Black children learn patriotism from their teachers while they hear about the harsh realities of racism from barbershop banter by ex-WWII veterans who are all too willing to share stories of disparate treatment. The Black community is stable, patriotic, but perturbed that Blacks were still experiencing discrimination and prejudice after their service to the country in WWII. Miller's portrayal of Black life in this Texas town is so poignant and palpable that the reader can feel the love and education that Black children received at the hands of their elders. If the narrative has one shortcoming, it is that Miller does not explore the psychological impact segregation had on his family and friends. In this light, Miller's view appears a bit romanticized and one is left wondering if he left out a few unpleasant details.

"The Teenage and Young Adult Experience," Part II, continues the chronicle about Black life in East Austin, Texas by taking the reader to the all Black Anderson High School. Miller provides vivid descriptions of pep rallies, homecoming parades, and a high school band that won seven state trophies. The author waxes rhapsodically about caring Black teachers and administrators who encouraged students to participate in extracurricular activities and demanded academic excellence. It is in this chapter that Miller begins the process of using his life experiences as a backdrop for serious social commentary and policy prescriptions. He contends that desegregation not only failed to deliver on its promise of a better education for African Americans, but also that it led to the unraveling of Black neighborhoods and the dislocation of Black children to less nurturing environments. It was in these dislocated environments that Black children became branded as learning deficient; a branding that Miller calls a "contemporary form of genocide on Black children in America"(p.61). As a remedy, he espouses the hiring of more Black teachers, administrators and, under the right circumstances, the building of Black schools. It is surprising to encounter such an insular argument from a Black conservative, but Miller gives sufficient evidence to support his position, making his call for community based schools cogent.

Miller details his experience of discrimination in the workplace in Part III, "Life Experiences in Employment." He takes the reader through a Clarence Thomaseque story of being unable to find a job commensurate with his education. As a result, he and his family lived in a squalid public housing project amidst crime and pests. While Miller eventually found gainful employment in various federal programs and state agencies, it was an employment life rife with disparate treatment that culminated in him filing several discrimination lawsuits during his career. Again, Miller's life experiences inform his policy prescriptions. He calls for the creation of a new non-profit organization that would "provide counseling and legal assistance for the purpose of filing lawsuits against employers that discriminate against Blacks" (p.85). In Miller's view, the necessity for such an organization exists because the NAACP has abandoned such advocacy in favor of political grandstanding and acting as a *de facto* arm of the Democratic Party. His call for a new organization is persuasive when one considers the NAACP's lower profile in the Black community and the ubiquity of workplace discrimination in American society.

Part IV, "A Matter of Politics," recalls with resonance Miller's experience as a Black Republican in the Black community. His account corroborates the illiberal tendencies in the Black counter public described by Michael Dawson in *Black Visions*. As a Black Republican, Miller experienced the loss of friendships, rejection of his policy proposals at community meetings, and the stunting of his political ambitions. Miller admits that the pressure to conform was so great that he contemplated returning to the Democratic Party (p.92). It is a brief, but moving, reminiscence of a Black American attempting to be true to his beliefs and participate in the political life of the Black community.

The question of the proper name for the descendents of American slaves and the need for the development of a Black ideology is confronted in Part V, "A Matter of Black Pride." It is an interesting discourse that ends with Miller settling on Negro or Black as proper appellations and opining that Black Americans must develop their own version of individualism for their exploitation to cease (p. 119-120). His call for a Black individualism (Miller does not use this term, but that is what his advice amounts to) is innovative and has merit, while his reason for rejecting the term African American is sound as he explains that the term can also apply to persons of European and African descent that emigrate from Africa, and, therefore, does not provide the identification the Black American community seeks.

Three subsequent chapters, Parts VI, VII, and VIII, titled "Predicaments of Blackness," "Escaping Black Poverty," and "Essence of Black American Greatness," consecutively, offer solutions to the ills facing Black Americans. Confidence is placed in individual initiative, self-discipline, a measured group ideology, and a willingness to fight for fair and equal treatment as the solutions to Black progress in contemporary American society. Miller's analysis is trenchant and insightful here, though it would have been more comprehensive had he mentioned the role external forces have played (e.g. government actions, drugs) in forestalling African American unity.

The final chapter, Part IX, titled "Some Afterthoughts," rounds out Miller's discourse with sober contemplations about what he may have achieved in a nonracialized world and the impact racism is having on his progeny. Here Miller subtly conveys that racism's impact is pervasive and far-reaching. The tones of his lamentations are touching and epitomize the strength and resolve that have been the hallmarks of his personal struggle. Despite his disclaimer "I harbor no bitterness," (p.158) the commentary leaves no doubt that racism has been, and continues to be, a *bete noire* for Miller. The chapter's one drawback is the sparseness of Miller's discourse about what he believes he could have achieved and the current travails of his offspring. No specific examples of either are mentioned. Such insights would most likely have been illuminating. It appears, however, that Miller has come to a juncture where he feels has made his case and is content to just mention, and not dwell on, the regrettable.

Concepts of a Black Conservative: Candid Political Incorrectness by Connie Miller, Sr. is a creative compilation that delivers on the title's promise to provide the concepts of a Black conservative in a politically incorrect fashion. Miller skillfully utilizes his own experiences to advocate for Black educational environs for Black children, a Black ideology, Black solidarity, and a return to the nomenclature of Black American. In the process, he offers a reconstructed Black conservatism that is individual and community focused and that embraces the Black identity in solving group problems.

Unlike many Black conservatives, Miller does not pretend that racism and discrimination does not exist; instead, he challenges Blacks to confront their fears and face these scourges head on. It is his willingness to acknowledge the extracommunity obstacles facing African Americans that gives the book a distinctive quality and hints at a reconstruction of Black conservatism. In his inaugural effort, Miller offers a lifetime of experience to the Black community coupled with sage advice. It is advice that the Black community, and in fact all of American society, would do well to consider.