

Dr. Jonathan David Farley, Green Party candidate for U.S. Congress from Tennessee's 5th district (<http://www.votefarley2002.org>), is a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar at Oxford University and assistant professor of mathematics at Vanderbilt University, Nashville. He graduated summa cum laude with an A.B. in Mathematics from Harvard University in 1991. He received his doctorate in Mathematics from Oxford University in 1995.

In 1994 he was awarded Oxford University's Senior Mathematical Prize and Johnson Prize for his research (Oxford's highest mathematics awards). From 1995 to 1997, he was a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in Berkeley, California.

Research Interests: Lattice Theory, Theory of Ordered Sets, Discrete Mathematics

-0-

I was at a house party in Murfreesboro, just south of Nashville, a town known primarily for being the home of professional wrestler Hulk Hogan. It was just before the presidential elections, but I had nothing on my mind except having fun.

The Democrats and Republicans are like Siamese twins, joined at the wallet.

I was the only African-American in the house, and I figured that, since everyone there was a liberal, I wouldn't hear anything shocking. I

was dead wrong. This is what I heard—and when I did hear it, I had to sit up and take notice:

"The Green Party," someone said, in another conversation, "is the first party since the Black Panthers to support reparations for slavery."

I was floored. Immediately I was energized, excited, and determined to do what I could to build the Green Party. I had missed the Sixties (by five months); but this was the organization, the Movement, that I had been waiting for.

Nevertheless, given the disaster that has been the Bush presidency—given his rejection of the Kyoto accords, his flouting of the UN Conference on Racism, his catastrophic war against Afghanistan, his saber-rattling with China, his threat of a renewed arms race with Star Wars, his shredding of the Constitution and the subordination of the people's interests to those of the oil lobby—how could any rational being support the Green Party? **Didn't the Green Party, by tipping the balance in favor of Bush, hand the Republicans a noose to put around our necks?**

Reparations Now!

Before the party in Nashville, I had already been drifting Greenward for a couple of weeks. I decided not to vote for Gore after I learned of his running mate's hostility towards affirmative action, and I gave the Green Party a look when I learned that Dr. Ray Winbush, director of the prestigious Race Relations Institute at Fisk University, had attended the Green Party convention.

Still, I didn't think much of the Greens. **They seemed to be just another group of alienated white hippies primarily concerned with the environment, but ignorant (perhaps willfully so) of the issues that affected black people specifically.**

I remembered the lesson of black communists and socialists in the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties. Eminent scholars like W.E.B. DuBois realized that white socialists, though in

[Links](#)

[Send this page to a friend](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Remove](#)



If someone passed [bc](#) along to you make sure you visit [Free Sign Up](#) page.

Don't miss anything!

Other Commentaries in this issue:

[Tar Baby Outrage!: Racism and Corruption at the Redstone Arsenal](#)

[Condoleezza's Complaint: Paratroopers in the Basement: Connie's image and the Venezuelan coup](#)

[A Law That Gives Racism Something to Fear:](#) by Colonel Deputy U.S. Marshal Matthew Fogg, Guest Commentator

Commentaries in previous issues :

[Condoleezza & Geraldo, Fine Pair: The Role Model Burden](#)

[Hard Right Cash Defeat in Black City - This Time Ultra-Conservative Favor](#)

principle opposed to racism, remained embedded in America's racial matrix. By playing down the importance of race in history, the white socialists were essentially relegating black political issues to the back of the bus.

When I heard Green presidential candidate Ralph Nader speak in Nashville, he only confirmed my views, dismissing a question about police brutality with the glib response, "Not all policemen are bad."

That was before the party in Nashville.

 **From the Green Party platform: We recognize that people of color have legitimate claims in this country to reparations...** 

Historically, many black political movements have demanded reparations, of course, but they have always been small, and too radical even for most African-Americans. The Green Party—yes, to a large extent because it is white—may succeed where these fringe parties have failed: It has a larger base of support, international connections, and, as its presidential candidate, Ralph Nader, a universally respected champion of consumer rights, occupational safety, and the environment. (The Green candidate for Senate in Tennessee was Tom Burrell, an African-American.)

The Green Party platform reads: "We recognize that people of color have legitimate claims in this country to reparations in the form of monetary compensation for these centuries of discrimination. We also uphold the right of the descendants of the African slaves to self-determination."

What other issues do Greens and blacks support?

1. The removal of the Confederate flag from all public spaces.
2. A reappraisal of Third World debt.
3. Community control of the police.
4. An end to the war on drugs, Three Strikes, and the prison-industrial complex (which has left over a million blacks in prison).
5. Abolition of the death penalty.
6. Statehood for the District of Columbia (so blacks can get in the Senate—crack addicts who have been caught on film need not apply).
7. Free public education through college or vocational school.
8. Universal health insurance.
9. A living wage (so minimum wage workers can afford to raise a family).
10. The granting of new trials to political prisoners like Native American activist Leonard Peltier and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal.
11. An end to corporate welfare and the surrender of our government to big business.
12. Electoral reform, including making Election Day a holiday, and the abolition of the Electoral College.

The list goes on. The full platform can be found at <http://www.gp.org>. (Readers beware: there is a tiny organization masquerading as "the Green Party" which also has a web site, leading to endless confusion.)

Cory Booker Loses in Newark, New Jersey

**Newark: The First Domino
- The Hard Right Tests its National Black Strategy**

**Fruit of the Poisoned Tree
The Hard Right's Plan to Capture Newark NJ - A 5, 2002**

**A Letter from Harvard:
"How to spot a "Black Trojan Horse." Dr. Martin Kilson, Guest Comment:**

Reparations Part One: The True Value of Some Land and an Animal

The Living Wage Movement: A New Beginning - Bread, Power and Civil Rights in 19 Languages



Rep. Cynthia McKinney's Statement on the Events September 11: The need an investigation of the events surrounding September 11 is as obvious as is the need for an investigation of the Enron debacle.

Make The Amendment: How to Get the U.S. Government Out of the International Drug Trade

Psychologically Unfit: The U.S. Can't Handle the Death Penalty

Linguistic Profiling: By Patrice D. Johnson, guest commentator

When people ask me why I support the Green Party, I say that I will support a party that supports me, that supports us, that supports reparations. This is not mere idealism. We are taking the struggle for reparations to another level, that of electoral politics.

 **Congress has surrendered completely
to the madness of King George.** 

Yes, a Bush administration and Supreme Court may repeal our hard-won freedoms, but we must remember that the Supreme Court did not grant us those freedoms: the people, united and organized, demanded and won them. We must stop wishing that a white-led administration—Democratic or Republican—will throw us a few crumbs, such as affirmative action. After all, we got affirmative action because, in the Sixties, organizations like the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam were demanding reparations, even a separate nation. We got affirmative action because they were strident, uncompromising, and organized. In the Eighties we stopped demanding and started petitioning. And that's when the Right, sensing weakness, began to turn the clock back.

We've gotten too used to the warm bed of straw that the Democrats have laid out for us in the barn. So afraid are we of the cold night air, that we are unwilling to leave them—when in fact, the Big House and all that's inside it belong to us by right. The owners will not yield it to us willingly. They won't give it up even if we ask with sugar on top. A thousand disparate voices, dispersed among a thousand fledgling organizations, won't make them surrender. But they will run for the hills if we shout with one voice.

One of Our Candidates Is Missing

A major concern African-Americans had in the last election was this: a vote for the Greens seemed to be a vote for Bush.

Unfortunately, the flip side is that a vote for Al Gore was a vote for Al Gore. Since the Democrats lost the race anyhow, it was, ironically, Gore supporters who wasted their votes.

Let's set the record straight: No one in the Green Party expected Ralph Nader to win. What we were hoping for—and, yes, it was a gamble—was 5% of the vote. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the millions of “yellow Greens” who chickened out at the last minute and voted Democratic, the Green Party might have gotten its 5%, and hence might have become eligible for federal election matching funds, which we need to win the battle for democracy. This would bring with it publicity, with which we could pressure the media to cover real issues. Green issues—not tissue issues (like whether rap CDs should have warning labels)—would begin to occupy their rightful place on the center stage of political debate. The fact that (it seems) we lost the gamble does not mean we were wrong to make it.

Liberal Democrats often charge Ralph Nader with saying that “there's no difference between the Democrats and Republicans.” I personally have never heard him say that. I believe there is a marked difference between Al Gore and George Bush, as the last 15 months have proven: Al Gore grew a beard, and George Bush didn't.

But seriously, don't be fooled by the rhetoric. We have little reason to believe that the Democrats, long-term, would have been any better than they have been in the past. Don't take it from me: take it from Bev, a woman I corresponded with. Bev was angry.

Those Democrats take our vote for granted, she complained: They come around begging for our votes once every four years, and then they ignore us until the next election.

But what's a girl to do? Vote for the Republicans, who, aside from sprinkling Spanish into speeches here and there and showcasing four-star generals, are openly hostile to minorities? Heck, no. So the Democrats keep us in their corner, expecting us to help them win the prizefight, but giving us nothing in return but their sweaty towels.

Take Bill Clinton, hailed by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison as “the first black president.” When Clinton was choking on cigar smoke at the height of the Lewinsky scandal, his greatest defenders were the members of the Congressional Black Caucus. But this is the Clinton who, in 1992, dished Jesse Jackson (the Democratic Party's election-year “minority whip” and whipping boy) in front of the entire country. This is the Clinton who, his first week in office, blockaded Haiti to keep black political refugees from coming to America.

This is the Clinton who got my vote, twice.

Take Montgomery, Alabama. The white Democratic mayor, elected by a narrow margin thanks to the black vote, showed his gratitude by refusing to discipline police officers who bullishly beat a black man.

 **What we need is a Black Bloc Party.** 



So what's a people to do?

African-American political leaders have failed to put into practice a saying everybody else understands: You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. Or, fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. Instead, we seem to think the saying goes: I'll scratch your back, you shove! *** in my face, and I'll scratch your back again, with a smile!

Dr. Lenora Fulani, one-time leader of the now-fratricidal Reform Party, says we need a third party. But it can't be a party that focuses on black interests, she argues, because we're only 12% of the population. We have to assimilate, merge with whites, even if they are anti-Semites like Pat Buchanan.

The good doctor is partly right. We do need a third party. But she's also partly wrong. A Black Bloc Party (call it what you will) is viable. In Europe, minority parties, such as the Ulster Unionists in Britain, do have influence precisely because the major parties are almost evenly balanced. They let the major parties know what it will take to garner their support; and the major parties had better deliver.

But, one might argue, wouldn't such a third party only hurt the Democrats? You bet it would. They would have to make a choice: Continue the slide towards the right, or address our issues. They might call our bluff, or decide that they would rather lose the White House than lose white votes, but it's all good: At least we'd finally see that the "liberals" we've trusted for decades are, at the end of the day, nothing but a bunch of good ol'

 **The Green Party and the black agenda are going in the same direction.** 

boys in white sheets.

For too long, African-Americans have been living off the Democratic Party the way a lamprey lives off a shark; and we all know that the Replutocrats are no alternative. What we need is a Black Bloc Party—because the roof is on fire. I believe the Greens can be the vehicle we need to reach that party. We need candidates who will represent us, and not merely black skins in white masks who will sell us out. The Green Party and the black agenda are going in the same direction. So let's join.

Election 2000, Ground Zero

Don't get me wrong: I felt unwell the morning after the presidential elections. I live in Nashville, Tennessee—Gore Country, Ground Zero of the campaign. I had woken up at 3 a.m. on November 8 to turn on the TV and see who won, only to learn that it was "too close to call."

And when I learned how close—500 votes in Florida—I became positively sick. The Green Party had won more than enough votes there—90,000—to put Al Gore over the top, even if just 0.5% of those Nader supporters had voted for Gore instead.

"Ralph Nader is at the bottom of the moral scale," angry Democrats told me. "I'll never vote for him, ever!"

But I felt better when I realized who was really to blame for Gore's (apparent) defeat: Gore himself.

The way politics works is, if you want my vote, you have to do something for it. Gore had months to court the Green vote; but even two weeks before the election, he explicitly said he would not.

Of course, if Gore had catered to the Greens, and instead conservative Democrats had defected from the party and voted for Bush, no one would be blaming the conservatives. Instead, they would be asking themselves how they could win those voters back. This is not speculation—it is what actually happened in 1984 and 1988. That's why Gore helped found the Democratic Leadership Council.

Despite African-Americans' record turnout at the polls, Gore even ran from blacks, up until the last few weeks: He chose an anti-affirmative action running mate. He refused to speak at Fisk University, despite repeated invitations (until the last week, when the race was close). Even when it could have won him the White House, Gore did not back up Jesse Jackson and the NAACP in their investigations of voter intimidation in Florida.

Gore's campaign staff was incompetent. He could have crushed Bush in a landslide. Gore lost because his supporters lacked the fire of the Republicans.

Gore lost because of Gore.

Unipolar Disorder: The World after September 11

While I agree that there is a significant difference between Al Bush and George Gore, we can't blame Greens for what happened post-September 11: the emergence of the United States as a global behemoth, a bull in a china shop, unencumbered by treaties, diplomacy, or human rights. After all, no Greens are in Congress, and it's Congress that has surrendered completely to the madness of King George.

“ To be honest, the Green Party does consist almost entirely of white hippie tree-huggers.”

And let's not paint too rosy a picture about America under President Gore: One girl I met claimed that we had to support Gore for president, because then-Governor Bush was executing so many people. She seemed to forget that Bush, Cheney, Lieberman and Gore all support the death penalty.

A white man I met claimed that Gore would have pursued a radically different course in the Middle East than Bush has. He ignored Lieberman's recent resolution supporting Israel's military attacks in Jenin, and Al Gore's own statement, during the second presidential debate, that without question, "we stand with Israel."

Bush is proceeding madly towards drilling in Alaska, but Occidental Oil, a company closely linked with the Gore family, was, until recently, determined to drill in Colombia, despite the fact that the U'wa people (whose ancestral lands would have been desecrated by the drilling) were determined to commit mass suicide rather than allow that to happen. Incidentally, it was the Clinton-Gore administration that approved \$1.3 billion in military aid for the Colombian government, with Clinton even demanding that the aid not be dependent on Colombia's improving its human rights record. As is well known, the Colombian military works closely with paramilitary death squads, who together kill about 80% of the 3,000 people who are massacred each year in Colombia's civil war.

And most importantly, we must recall that, despite Bush's horrific record, all the media pundits claimed that the winner of the election would be the loser, a four-year lame duck president, facing gridlock at every juncture. That it did not turn out this way should shame the pundits, the papers, the political scientists, and, most of all, the party of Gore.

This is not to say that a Gore presidency would have been isomorphic to Bush's; it is merely acknowledging reality: To call Albert a prince is to believe in fairy tales. It is the Greens, not the Democrats and certainly not Al Gore, who are the opposition in America today.

The Color Blind Spot

One objection many African-Americans have to the Green Party is that it is a white party. To which I respond:

"Oh, and the Democratic Party isn't?"

Indeed, of the three main presidential candidates in 2000, Ralph Nader is the only one who could be considered non-white. (His parents are from Lebanon.) His 2000 running mate, Winona LaDuke, is a Native American.

So when I hear people say that the Green Party consists almost entirely of white hippie tree-huggers, I always laugh. To be honest, the Green Party does consist almost entirely of white hippie tree-huggers, but I laugh anyway. While the Green Party, despite its name, has very little color in it, it is still the most pro-black of the three main parties.

Nonetheless, Grady, a student at Fisk University, told me that he believed Nader and Bush were conspiring together to undermine blacks. Other blacks have told me that the Green Party only takes the positions it does to “trick” blacks into voting for them.

So basically, these blacks are saying that they won't support a party that claims it supports reparations; they will only support a party (like the Democrats) that has proven that it won't. Someone please explain the logic here?

As to the Green Party's secret agenda to undermine Black America: I only wish the Green Party were that well organized. But the fact is, the Green Party was not trying to trick blacks into supporting them by adopting its amazing pro-reparations platform. I know this—because the Green Party made no effort whatsoever to recruit people of color!

Colorlines Magazine accused Nader of having a “racial blind spot.” But as Nader himself has pointed out, when we fight big polluters, when we fight for a living wage and better schools, it's people of color who benefit. But if that's not a convincing defense, let me add that the Green Party is not your average bear (or elephant or donkey): It is not a top-down party, led by Ralph Nader. It is a grass-roots party. The Green Party of the United States does not tell the Green Party of Tennessee what to do; the Green Party of Tennessee calls the shots in Tennessee.

This is why blacks who want to start chapters of the Green Party need not be concerned that their party will be co-opted or taken over by whites. What they (the blacks) say, goes. This makes the Green Party more democratic than a lot of black organizations, the church and the NAACP included.

This bottom-up structure is a strength and a weakness. Many local Green Party chapters are not ready for prime time. In Nashville, for instance, when Ralph Nader came to speak, the local Green Party did not even have a literature table set up at his talk, so that people who wanted to join the party could find out more. Despite the Green Party's lack of organization, I want to be a part of it. It is African-Americans who can help build it.

Of course, we must remember the lesson of DuBois and still be wary of majority white parties: Soon after I started campaigning for the Greens, instructing party officials that they would bring thousands of blacks into their ranks by publicizing the reparations issue, I got this message from a Green activist:

“Dear Professor: Reparations on slavery? Get over it, it's time to move on!” (This man soon stepped down from his position after other Greens chastised him.)

When I decided to run for US Congress as a Green, despite my getting the endorsement of the Green Party, some of the officers of the Green Party of Tennessee conspired to keep information about my campaign off the party website. Their fear was that reparations would be “destructive to the Green Party and its relations with both the black and white communities.” This is classic white liberal paternalism: they know better than we do about what we should ask for, and when.

Having said this, the Green Party of the United States is progressive—at the national level. The national co-chairs “get it,” people like Anita Rios (a Latina) and Ben Manski (a—well, a white guy). It is just some local chapters that need to be brought in line. And I am proud to be in the same party as people like Donna Jo Warren of California (who has been investigating the crack-CIA connection), candidate for Lieutenant Governor. So when people ask me if I am still running under the Green banner, I reply, “Yes!” I will not let the reactionaries chase me out of the party. Instead, I will rout them.

To the Spoiler Goes the Victory?

An NAACP official said recently that he won't work with Greens because “Greens aren't winners.” But Greens can win. We're part of the government in France and Germany. And in Nashville, where I am running for Congress, we've even gotten international publicity. The congressional elections will see a conservative Democrat (old, white, male) and an almost identical conservative Republican (old, white, male) split the vote. Given that Nashville is 25% black and our agenda is 100% black, we might just slip into office with 34%. I'm working on my professional wrestling moves even as I write.

More is true. The Green Party can shift the terms of debate—without a major electoral victory—so that the Democrats adopt our main platform issues. Already, former president Jimmy Carter is suggesting an Election Day holiday. Municipalities and universities across

the country are adopting the living wage. Rapprochement with Cuba is around the corner. And of course, the degradation of our rivers, woods and air is a problem that won't go away.

The Green Party is not just an environmental party. While it does support the traditional environmental issues—the abolition of nuclear weapons, the search for renewable energy sources like solar and wind power, the labeling of genetically engineered “Frankenfood” in supermarkets—it also has a social justice agenda that can't be matched by the Demopublicans. This agenda is so radical that the Greens won't ever be a majority party; but they can become the party of color.

Towards a Politics of the Future

My vote for the Green Party was not a protest vote. I did not vote Green because I am a naïve idealist: It was a pragmatic choice. While I am cognizant of the dangers of a Bush Supreme Court, I know that, every election, we will be presented with the same choice between a conservative Democrat and a Republican bogeyman. That cycle must be broken.

The Green Party is not perfect, but, as one former Black Panther recently told me, it's all we have. The whiteness of the Green Party does not prevent it from having the most pro-black platform of the three major parties; and the best way to keep the Greens from betraying us is to join them.

African-Americans must start thinking about long-term political objectives, about building a true opposition. Green should be in the middle of our rainbow coalition. If blacks join the Green Party en masse, it will become our party. And, with that base, we can begin to build the nation that Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X only dreamed about. After all, black and Green make gold—the colors of African liberation.

The Democrats and Republicans are like Siamese twins, joined at the wallet. At some point, we must break the stranglehold they have on electoral politics. Someone once said that, if we'd begun building a third party in 1980, we would have had a viable alternative by now. With two parties, we only have two choices. With three parties, we have only one.

Everything—nations, movements, universes—must have a beginning. For us to have a future worth having, there must be a change in the political order. The world is relying on us to effect that change—we, who live in the belly of the beast. So let us take up our tools, makeshift as they are; let us assemble our armies, and sail to meet the foe. The beach is before us, our ships eager to reach it. There are enemy cannons there, exploding with thunder and light. Many fall away. But this we know: the freedom or servitude of an entire continent, of future generations, is in our hands. We alight...



Your comments are welcome. Visit the [Contact Us](#) page for E-mail or Feedback.

www.blackcommentator.com

[Click here to return to the home page](#)