



President's Report

The Rev. Terry L. Melvin

**45th International Convention
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists**

Washington, DC

May 26, 2016

Thank you for that warm reception. I'll try to use the next 20 minutes or so to live up to the good things that my dear wife said about me.

First, let me say "Good Morning" to each and every delegate and guest attending our 45th international convention.

Give yourselves a big hand for just being here and for being the keepers of a proud legacy in the labor movement.

Let me also give a shout out to our host city –Washington, DC, which is a WHOLE lot less chocolate than it used to be when Marion Barry was mayor and running this town.

I also want you to give it up for our host chapter – the D.C. CBTU Chapter. Would the leadership and members of the D.C. Chapter please stand up now, so you can be recognized by the delegates.

Also, I need to thank my hardworking and patient staff – Fareed, Sherice, Alicia, Philip, and what I call my convention "SWAT Team" – Deb, Portia, Angela, Dianne, Shirley and so many others who have volunteered so much of their time and talent to make sure you folks have a convention experience that is both smooth and rewarding.

So would all of the folks who make this the best convention in the labor movement, please stand up --- including our steadfast Sergeants-of-arms.

C'mon family, show them some real CBTU love.

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Let me also take a minute to personally congratulate Jos Williams on his recent retirement as president of the Metropolitan Washington Labor Council.

Me and Jos go way back. I've always appreciated his wisdom, his humor and his unflinching willingness to speak truth to power for the working men and women in the DC area, across the nation and around the world.

Jos, your legacy will always be secure here, with your CBTU family. Now we're going to put you to work as a CBTU retiree.

Let me also welcome your successor, Jackie Jeter, to the CBTU family. I'm sure the leadership baton is in good, steady hands. Always know, Jackie, that you can count on CBTU to have your back whenever the stakes are high and the battle is tough.

Best of luck to you, Sister Jeter.

Returning to DC

It's been a minute since we've gathered in Washington, DC. But holding our 45th International CBTU Convention in this capital city, in this election year, carries special meaning.

It was here, in 1973, that the first convention was held to formally establish the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. And we are so blessed to still have with us two of our founding fathers, William Simons and our very first president, William "Bill" Lucy."

Unfortunately, Brother Simons, who I believe is 91 or 92 years old but always a regular at our conventions, will not be joining us this year.

That touches me personally. Because though Brother Simon is a quiet gentleman, I could always feel his fierce loyalty and pride in this organization.

We send our gratitude and best wishes to Brother Simons and his family. [LEAD OVATION]

His absence magnifies the gift having Bill Lucy with us this morning. He's a legend and a NATIONAL TREASURE. And he is so generous with his wisdom. Simply, there is no us without you, Bill. Thank you so much what you and others did back in 1973.

We've come a mighty long way since then.

Back then, big Afros and wide bell-bottom pants were considered "fly." Now, cell phones and Beyonce rule the world.

Back in '73, the AFL-CIO was hostile to CBTU's defiant call for unity among black workers. This week, we will welcome Fefere Gebre, the executive vice president of the AFL-CIO.

Perhaps the biggest change is who occupies the White House. In 1973, it was Richard Nixon, "Tricky Dick," a paranoid and conservative white Republican who was eventually driven from office by the Watergate scandal.

In 2016, a Black man is Commander-in-Chief and a beautiful Black family lives in the White House. God is good.

But unfortunately, as we have learned today, some things haven't changed in the District of Columbia.

It is a national disgrace that 530,000 (?) citizens in our nation's capital are disenfranchised, without full voting representation in Congress – even though they pay taxes, serve in the military and provide home and security for world leaders.

DC is still a black-majority city, and this racial injustice must come to an end. CBTU will stand with Mayor Bowser, Delegate Norton and the disenfranchised citizens of this town for as long as it takes to free America's last colony! It's time to make DC America's 51st state – NOW! Let's do this.

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America's "Black Moment"

Let me begin my report today with a bold observation:

I believe America is experiencing a **Black Moment**. That claim might make some folks uncomfortable. So be it.

Just consider a few trends:

- The **Black Lives Matter** movement has put criminal justice reform in the national spotlight and on the agenda of most political candidates.
- The **Fight for 15 movement** is led by black and brown people and they have accomplished what was considered impossible a few years ago – a wave of minimum wage victories across the country – from New York to Seattle to California.
- **Black turnout for Hillary Clinton** in the Democratic primaries, especially in the South and Midwest, has propelled her to a commanding lead in votes and pledged delegates to the nominating convention this summer.

- And, of course, **President Obama** is still wielding his executive power to make more than 4 million workers eligible for overtime pay.

In this moment that America is experiencing flashes of black dominance, what is refreshing and significant to me is that we're not trying to make white folks feel comfortable: Because the truth about race and power and privilege in America IS uncomfortable.

We are defining our own version of "American-ness." We are controlling our own narratives – from Shonda Rhimes to Kendrick Lamar to Serena Williams.

We are holding friends and foes alike accountable – just ask Bernie Sanders or Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump.

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Of course, America's inspiring but unforeseen **Black Moment** has also unleashed another familiar pattern in American life: white rage.

- We experienced its deadly outcome last summer with the massacre of nine Black members of Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston by a young, angry believer in white supremacy.
- It shows up in widespread efforts to suppress our votes.
- And in an obstructionist Congress that will block anything that this Black president proposes to do – from passing a budget to holding hearings for his Supreme Court nominee.

This hate, this instinctive rejection of Black legitimacy – from the White House to our sacred houses of worship – has fueled the rise of Donald J. Trump, the billionaire bigot who has hijacked the Republican Party's nomination for President.

Trumpism has created an unpredictable political climate that's comic yet toxic; energized but dangerous.

The Devil or Deliverance

I'm a preacher. So I believe in saving souls. But I hope, hope, HOPE there is a special place in hell for likes of Donald Trump (and maybe Ben Carson, too).

I see this election as a choice between the devil and deliverance.

If Trump gets the keys to the White House, better get your affairs in order.

- He'll have his HUGE hand on the nuclear button
- He'll pack the Supreme Court and the rest of the federal court system with judges that will be hostile to voting rights, unions, civil rights, immigrants and women.
- He'll put the knife to Obamacare
- He'll turn a blind eye to racism and police brutality
- Safety net programs for the elderly, the poor, and children will be slashed to pay for tax breaks for his wealthy backers

Worse of all, Trump would set a permissive tone for evil.

Haters would know that bigotry is back in business in the White House, and the laws of white supremacy that make being Black and outside of the “comfort zone” of white people punishable will be upheld with lethal force if necessary – anytime, anywhere, with anybody.

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Deliverance

Now, that’s the devil’s plan. But I hope you agree with me that most Americans would rather vote for a candidate who offers a path to deliverance:

- **Deliverance** from hard times and little hope
- **Deliverance** from rents too high and wages too low
- **Deliverance** from locked up parents and dead young black bodies piling up in the streets
- **Deliverance** from shackles of debt
- **Deliverance** from a broken immigration system that punishes foreign workers but not the greedy employers who exploit them
- **Deliverance** from an unjust education system that scapegoats teachers and steers poor students and kids of color into the school-to-prison pipeline
- **Deliverance** from a criminal justice system that houses more people in prisons and jails and detention centers than on college campuses.

We’ve got to come together to keep America heading toward the light of equality and justice. We cannot backslide into the dark days of Jim Crow, or hooded vigilantes, or church burnings.

Don't Buy the Hype

We are told by so-called “political insiders” that Trump’s election chances are slim and shady. But I confess, when I was in Canada recently, I made sure my credentials were in order—just in case. You feel me?

But my advice is free and simply:

- Don't get caught with fickle daily polls
- Don't base your opinions about a candidate solely on gossip from Ro-Ro or Mimi or JaQuann or Pookie.
- And please DON'T assume somebody else is going to vote the “right way” for you.
- Don't complain about the outcome if you don't even bother to show to vote

Remember, politicians don't always care about people. But they always care about voters.

Bernie and Hillary – Spill No Blood

I know we've got a lot of happy Hillary supporters here today and we've also got some proud, tenacious folks in the room who are still “Feeling the Bern.”

Let's be clear: We're not going to spill any blood today over them. Let the voters have their say.

But I do want to put this little thought on your mind: Voting is NOT only about preferences; it's about POWER.

Even if the Democratic Party doesn't do something FOR me specifically, I know the other party will likely do something AGAINST me

We've got to get our people to understand that this election is not just about personality: it's about power; power to create a future with less inequality and more opportunities.

So today I want to make CBTU's position and message absolutely clear: **JUST VOTE!**

- When the campaigning is over, **JUST VOTE.**
- When early voting starts, **JUST VOTE.**
- When Election Day rolls around, **JUST VOTE.**
- Tell your boys in the barbershop or your girls at the hair salon, **JUST VOTE.**

We can't be half-steppin' in November! Spread the message in your union and CBTU chapter.

Put **JUST VOTE** on your leaflets, bulletin boards or web sites. Encourage your community allies to use the slogan on their material.

For social media activists, use the hashtag **#JUSTVOTE** whenever you share news about elections or information about events. Tag your photos and videos with **#JUSTVOTE.**

If black lives truly matter, **JUST VOTE!**

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Why GOTV Matters So Much This Year

This will be the first presidential election since 2004 where Barack Obama's name won't be on the ballot. That could impact black turnout dramatically, if we don't double down on our GOTV efforts.

- According to a recent *New York Times* article, if black turnout for Democrats drops back to the pre-Obama level, it could cost Democrats a net loss of 2.8 million votes.

Clearly, that kind of drop-off could put Donald Trump in the White House and other Trump clones in Congress and statehouses across the nation.

Let me break it down even more with the youth vote:

Young voters could swing as many as 80 electoral votes in four key battleground states – Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida and Virginia.

Four years ago, if Romney had won half of the youth vote, or if millennial voters has just stayed home—then he, not President Obama, would have won the 2012 election.

The news here is that voter apathy is the backdoor to the White House for Donald Trump.

We cannot allow a lack of enthusiasm to distract us from what's at stake or the value of voting.

We have a duty to make good on the sacrifices made by countless men, women and children whose bones were broken but not their will to ensure black folks could exercise their democratic right to vote.

When we sit at home on Election Day, we give away our power. We give away our voice. We co-sign our own oppression with our silence.

That's unacceptable to me and to this organization!

We know there are still too many ridiculous barriers to voting:

- Laws that limit early voting.
- Laws with restrictive photo ID requirements.
- Too few voting machines or locations.
- Excessively waits in long lines.

But we cannot give in or retreat. That's why CBTU has joined with our other civil rights allies to call on Congress to restore the Voting Rights Act. We must immediately ensure every American has equal access to the polls. This is not 1963, and we don't do second class democracy anymore.

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No Crumbs, Please, for GOTV

Make no mistake: the outcome of the 2016 election could well ride on the political muscle of black trade unionists.

- One of every seven union members is African American
- Many CBTU chapters are in key battleground states like Ohio, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Virginia, Missouri and Florida.

This puts us – does it not – in the vanguard of the labor movement’s ground game. Now, we ain’t begging, but we won’t settle for crumbs to get out the maximum votes in our unions and our communities.

Don’t tell us to haggle over a small pot of GOTV money with our constituency group partners. Not when we KNOW outside consultants (mostly white) are raking in millions of dollars.

To get the massive black turnout that top Democratic leaders and labor leaders say is necessary, we want to be full partners in the strategy-making, the message development, the field operations and staff hiring.

We don’t need to be trained to talk to our folks. We don’t need a \$50,000 poll to figure out what issues are percolating in our communities – good jobs, reliable childcare, better schools, affordable housing, access to health care, police reform, fair trade deals to American jobs.

We just need resources, in a timely manner, to do what we do. We can also follow the example of our fine Ontario Chapter in Canada.

They produced a short film on their upcoming elections and a report card on all of the candidates. They sent the voter education package to their members, labor allies and the community.

How come **WE** can’t do that?

I say it takes Teamwork to make a Dream work. Let’s get busy!

Future of Workers Report

While we are locked into the 2016 political cycle right now, we have kept our eyes on the future of the labor movement. We're thinking and talking and exchanging ideas about what role can and should black trade unionists play in creating a more dynamic, diverse and transformed movement for ALL working people.

CBTU collaborated with a group of very influential African American leaders from major labor organizations to get wide input. The outcome was a working paper released last July entitled, "A Future for Workers: A Contribution from Black Labor."

It was not a report simply to air black grievances. For the first time, black union leaders compiled a comprehensive outlook to frame a much-needed discussion about race and the direction of the American labor movement.

It covers issue that resonates with our members and in our communities: like jobs and economic development; environmental justice; mass incarceration; wealth and inequality; and the education system.

The report has been widely distributed and well-received. It has led to 27 of our 54 CBTU chapters holding special meetings to broaden the dialog about building a better, diverse labor movement.

We've also collaborated with the AFL-CIO's Civil Rights Department to sponsor symposiums in conjunction with our CBTU chapters in DC and St. Louis. Both events drew more than 100 people, which confirmed to us that folks are eager to open a frank, constructive dialogue on race and other issues.

And we will continue to drive this important conversation to include more young workers, because they are the linchpin to a sustainable, growing labor movement.

I encourage all of you to download this remarkable report on our CBTU website – www.cbtu.org – join the conversation and give us your suggestions and feedback.

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Thank You, President Obama

CBTU first met Barack Obama in 2007 when he rocked our convention in Chicago. So it nearly brought me to tears when I realized this convention would be held in DC, as Barack Obama enters his final six months as the 44th President of the United States of America.

Had my eyes shed real tears as the first black American took the oath of office in January 2009 to lead this nation? Did this magical eight-year journey really happen?

Even though we disagree with our beloved president on trade and a few other issues, his record qualifies him as one of the greatest American presidents EVER.

- He got the economy going again
- He got bin Laden
- Got the nuke deal done with Iran
- Got the Affordable Health Care Act passed
- Re-open diplomatic relations with Cuba
- Got the Democrats back in the White House
- Got elected twice

- And he's got the baddest, classiest First Lady EVER!

President Obama has given a whole generation of kids – black, white, Asian, Mexican, Italian, Nigerian, Jamaican, South African – a new leadership role model. Leadership that's bright...bold...and unapologetically Black with a little bit of swagger.

Yes, it will be a sad, sad day when President Obama and the First Family leave the White House next January. So let's not waste a single day while he's still on the job to cherish his presidency and embrace his wonderful family.

So would you please join me in saying "Thank you, President Obama.

Thank you for lifting us up with your calm strength and character, with your quiet confidence and amazing grace.

Thank you for proving that "YES, WE CAN!"

CBTU loves you and your family so, so much.

Can I get an Amen?

CLOSING

Finally, this convention gives us the time and the space to recharge and refocus. But the real work begins when we get home. I'm fired up and ready to roll now!

WILL YOU STAND WITH ME...

- TO EDUCATE our family, friends, and neighbors on our issues
- TO HOLD POLITICIANS who get our votes accountable?
- TO REACH DOWN and pull up a young workers/activist into this movement
- TO KEEP THE DEVIL out of the White House
- TO BRING our community issues to labor's table and labor's issue to our kitchen table
- TO STAY ENGAGED in political organizing work beyond Election Day
- TO BRING JUSTICE TO THE people of FLINT, who are victims of environmental racism because insensitive leaders poisoned their water
- FOR AN ECONOMY that works for all
- FOR A FAIR AND JUST criminal justice system
- FOR A NATION where ALL Black Lives Matter

This is our time...this is our season...

Thank you and may God Bless you and our great movement!