

Team Building: An approach for blacks in America

By Michael A. Grant, J.D.
Special to Sentinel-Voice
Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines a team as: "A number of persons associated together in work or activity."

The goal of this article is to apply the above definition to a challenge that I would like to make to all Americans of African descent. We should think of ourselves as a team; potentially, a winning team. The timing for this challenge is ideal. For I sincerely believe that this is the best time in the history of this country to be an African-American living in America.

The first part of the definition should present no problem since we—as a group—are forced by racial identification to be associated

Jobs

(Continued from Page 10)
doing is for temporary jobs; 71 percent of the 200,000 people hired in the last fiscal year were in that category. Most of those were undoubtedly consultants, hired to do skilled, white-collar tasks. Both the number of people hired for and the number of advertised job-openings for blue-collar positions is very small, according to data gathered by *The New York Times*: Of the hundreds of job openings listed at the federal government's Internet site, there are few for entry-level positions—11 openings for nursing assistants, 6 for clerk-typists and 9 for mail and file clerks.

This is not a profile that encourages confidence in the federal effort that the President outlined. Of course, the President's plan—which has yet to be fully fleshed out—deserves a chance to work.

But we must point out that the problems with the new welfare law which some called attention to last summer have not disappeared.

Those problems can be most succinctly put by the question which will not go away:

Where are the jobs?

together. The second part of the definition, however, is more problematic.

Having recognized that we are lumped or classified as a member of the ethnic group called African-Americans, or Americans of African descent, the next question in the context of this discussion is, will we as individuals representing a broad spectrum of incomes, educational achievements, complexions, social and political affiliations, and religious denominations and choice (when it is appropriate) to work as members of one team?

No, this article is not about separatism. I am emphatically an integrationist. I proudly acknowledge my African ancestry but I am quintessentially American—and proud of it.

This article does not support any ideological camp's claim to preeminence. Its message is certainly not meant to be divisive. If anything, in the parlance of sports, it's an

attempt to discuss a strategy for winning in a game we did not create; playing by rules we did not construct.

And face it, in a country where political and economic decisions are routinely made based on lineage and group affiliation, to operate ignorant of these facts is to operate at one's own detriment (not a winning strategy).

Ultimately, I believe America will be stronger when the walls of ethnicity are replaced by the cement of a common national purpose, but until the majority embraces this vision, African-Americans must study the survival (winning) tactics of other ethnic and religious groups who know when to think and act broadly as Americans and when to think and act parochially as members of a special interest group (i.e., a team).

While the enumeration listed below is not meant to be exhaustive, I sincerely hope these suggestions will lead to

some behavioral modifications or, at least, spark some lively debate.

Suggestion for building an African-American team

1. Never refer to African-Americans as "they." Always begin with "we."

2. Refuse to be envious of another African-American's success.

3. Consciously seek out African-American owned businesses and support them.

4. If these businesses do not adhere to high standards (i.e. providing quality goods and services), share your constructive criticism with them before you cease patronizing them.

5. Assume that there are teachers who are not interested in your child receiving a quality education and get more involved in the child's education yourself.

6. Refuse to be guided by negative assumptions about other African-Americans based on skin color, church or fraternal affiliations, income, educational status or neighborhood of residence.

7. Financially support historically black institutions and organizations. We still desperately need them.

8. Speak positively about the genuine efforts of African-American leaders.

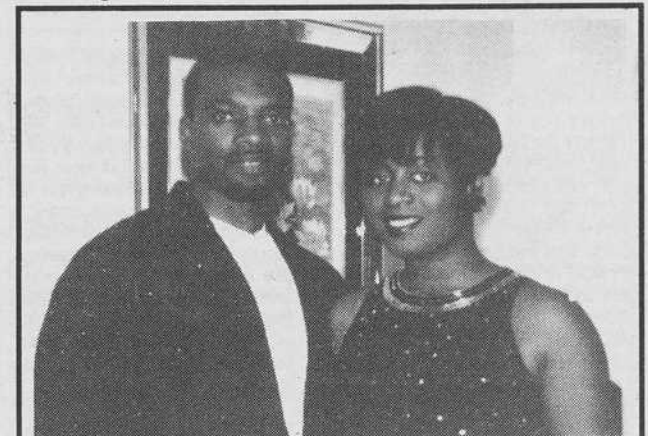
9. Visit a prison or jail for the purpose of helping to heal a wounded soul. Avoid being judgmental.

10. Strive to be a model of excellence, compassion, and generosity. Seek to restrain unbridled ego and to enjoy the social feeling of being a part of a beloved African-American team that uses one hand to pull itself together; the other to

connect with a larger American team.

When this final consolidation—all the ethnic teams playing on the same side—takes place, African-Americans, along with all other Americans, will find ourselves playing on the winningest team in history.

Michael A. Grant is a motivational speaker.



Engagement

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sawyer of Las Vegas announce the engagement of their daughter Ameika Ayanna Coleman to Roosevelt Lofton, Jr. of New York City, the son of Anna Lofton of New York.

Coleman graduated with honors from Southern University, Baton Rouge, La., with a bachelor's degree in communications.

Lofton earned his master's degree in sports administration from Gambling University. He is employed as an assistant track coach at Northern Arizona University.

A July wedding is being planned at the Sawyer's home in Las Vegas.

Rosewood

(Continued from Page 11)

In an emotion packed scene, the Rosewood survivors vividly recounted for the full Florida legislature the night of violence 70 years earlier and the personal pain and trauma that they had to live with their entire lives.

Spectators and legislators alike were moved to tears by the simple eloquence and dignity survivors displayed in telling their story. After a bit more partisan political wrangling, the legislature finally capitulated and awarded the survivors \$2 million.

The moment the claims bill was approved, the spectators gallery erupted in cheers, tears, and prayers of thanks.

While the award could never adequately compensate them for their pain, suffering and loss, it was more than a symbolic victory. It marked the first and only time in U.S. history that African Americans have ever gotten a government body to formally admit that it was liable for a racially-motivated act of violence against them.

Without their inspiring victory, the tragedy of Rosewood would almost certainly have remained buried deep in history. There are many lessons that we can learn from the triumph of the Rosewood survivors. The most important is that the crimes of the past must not and should not be forgotten and that justice can be attained if enough people are willing to work and fight for it. To ignore this in the film Rosewood is not only regrettable, it's inexcusable.

Dr. Earl Ofari Hutchinson is the author of *The Assassination of the Black Male Image and Beyond O.J.: Race, Sex and Class: Lessons for America.*

Suge

(Continued from Page 10)

encouraging to do positive music.

Before we parted in that courtroom, Suge had begun to understand that he, like us, is the patsy in this ongoing dirty drama. That we of NPCBW are not his enemy, and that his enemy—and a deadly one at that, is camouflaged in the ranks of his own Death Row company!

Now he must decide in the coming months and years what course he must take to extricate himself from this web of criminal deceit that has strangled him, stripping him of his office, his livelihood, and now his freedom for the next nine years!

There was another major revelation in store for me: It was reported in the February 28, 1997 issue of the LA Weekly that David Kenner, Suge's lawyer and lead defense counsel, is actually the chairman of the corporation that owns Death Row Records. According to the article, Kenner is the target of a federal grand

jury probe targeting the rap label for possible criminal racketeering charges which also include drugs, money laundering, and gang activities. In addition, all of Death Row's financial and business records have been subpoenaed as well as those of the other companies associated with Death Row.

To console him, I gave him a copy of my publication *Vital Issues: The Journal of African-American Speeches*—the limited edition issue which features all of the speeches and statements given at the Million Man March.

I inscribed the book with a spiritual message of hope and redemption (II Chronicles 7:14):

If my people will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven and forgive their sins and will heal the land!

He smiled and seemed, for the moment, comforted.

Now, let the healing begin!

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