

TO BE EQUAL

Faith of our fathers

By Hugh B. Price
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Special to Sentinel-Voice

With all the — justified; yes, absolutely — national acclaim Earl Woods has garnered for the bond that exists between him and his son Eldrick and the care and discipline with which he shepherded him to adulthood and golf stardom, one might think such relationships were unusual among African-Americans.

The same national wonder was evident at the closeness of the bond between Michael Jordan and his father, James, and Arthur Ashe and his father, Arthur Ashe, Sr.

It's worth pointing out, however, as we celebrate Father's Day this month, that the reality is just the opposite of what that wonder implies.

The real point of the close relationships of these three famous father-son pairs is that close father-son or -daughter relationships are no more unusual among African-Americans than among other peoples. They exist in the millions among us. They are unnoticed by the larger society only because the larger society is almost always blind to the good ordinary, everyday African-American fathers and mothers do.

So it would be with Earl and Tiger Woods, Arthur Ashe, Sr. and Arthur Ashe, Jr., James and Michael Jordan, Calvin and Grant Hill, and other black athletes and their fathers, were it not for the fact that the sons have wondrous athletic talent.

How many other wondrous black father-son or -daughter pairings are there among African-Americans of lesser or no athletic talent?

Indeed, if one looks closely at these famous father-son pairings, one readily sees that the foundation of their success was not really the cultivation of athletic talent at all. It was, first, the love of a father for his child, and, second, the cultivation by both father and son of the proper attitude toward achievement. That attitude is rooted in the mutual belief that the pursuit of excellence — and the personal discipline and judgment it requires — is a great, worthy goal.

One doesn't have to have any athletic ambitions or talent to pass on that ideal, to make it part of your own children's family heritage.

Do some black men have problems being fathers? Are there abusive fathers, irresponsible fathers, unfaithful husbands, uncaring fathers among the 35 percent of black families who are poor and among the rest who are not?

Of course. Why would one expect that black men would be different from other men in that regard — even as those problems are intensified and magnified by a three-decade-long double-digit unemployment rate that has left a third of black America in peril.

But the fact that some black fathers are deeply flawed shouldn't be confused with the goodness and faith of Black Fatherhood.

That legacy was often poignantly explored in a book published last year, *Faith of Our Fathers: African-American Men Reflect on Fatherhood*, edited by Andre C. Willis.

Not all of the fathers mentioned in the twelve writers' essays are worthy of emulation. And, clearly, some of the authors, their sons, have yet to fully come to grips with the men their fathers were or to fully flesh out their relationship to their own children.

But those flaws and failures, where they exist, are just the point: relationships between African-American fathers and their offspring are humanly complex.

Still, what does permeate most of the essays



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— whether intensely personal, or slyly humorous, or even slightly academic — is what Dr. Alvin Poussaint describes in the book's introduction as a sense of the "faith of our fathers — faith in us, faith in themselves, and faith in the world."

By that he and his colleagues meant our fathers' faith in their capacity to persist against often daunting odds: to not just endure, but to strive to better their lives and the lives of those around them.

And their faith in us, their offspring, that we will take up the indelible ancestral imperative of striving.

And, finally, that together we can continue to pursue what *faith* in this context means: that with our belief in the goodness of humanity and by our action we can hew a place of comfort and opportunity out of the society of our native land.

That was the faith by which three giants of black America who passed away in May lived. John H. Sengstacke, owner of The Chicago Daily Defender, Aaron E. Henry, of Mississippi, a longtime civil rights activist and Democratic Party stalwart, and the Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor, former pastor of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church were men who were committed to their families, their communities, and their nation.

Theirs is the faith our fathers and our mothers have always shown; and it is only by living up to this faith that we will have something to celebrate on the Father's Days of the future.

THIS WAY FOR BLACK EMPOWERMENT

Keeping up with the Joneses

By Dr. Lenora Fulani
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Much of the current debate on whether President Clinton should investigate Paula Jones' past sexual history has focused on what is legally or morally correct. However, the choice — as far as the Clinton Administration is concerned — is purely a political one. In the past he has investigated women who have made allegations of sexual involvement with him. During the 1992 campaign, a private investigator was paid \$100,000 as part of what the Clinton campaign called "bimbo" damage control. He obviously had no moral problems back then.

But today he is the President and the pitfalls are more hazardous. His attorney Bob Bennett backpedaled off of earlier statements that he would put Paula Jones' alleged promiscuity on trial because the White House feels that Clinton's support among women could suffer as a result. It's one thing for the President to have extramarital sexual encounters.

The public — including feminists — seems to tolerate that. It's quite another when he appears to be trying to cover them up, by maligning the reputation of the woman making the allegations. While he himself can't run for re-election, the Democrats want to try to regain a majority in Congress in



FULANI

1998 and Al Gore plans to run in 2000. The Democrats don't want to lose their gender gap edge.

Some critics have accused the feminists of being hypocritical for not supporting Paula Jones. I'd call it partisan. Most of them are Democrats. They supported Clinton. They have tried to project him as a feminist. They didn't want Paula Jones — or anyone —

undercutting that image.

A lot of them placed partisan interests above what many felt should have been a more sympathetic or at least open-minded response to Jones.

If the incident did happen the way Paula Jones described it, it does make you stop and think the timing. The encounter at the Excelsior Hotel, which Clinton is reportedly prepared to concede may have happened, would have taken place in May of 1991, when he was in the process of deciding to run for the Presidency.

He was already raising money and having strategy sessions about his campaign. If her story is true, it seems that he hadn't quite caught up with the fact that when you're running for President, or when you become President, you just have to learn to keep your pants on. It's kind of a basic rule of thumb.

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Why empowerment zones aren't working

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

There has been an inordinate and superfluous amount of publicity and hype given to empowerment zones in Chicago, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia/Camden, Baltimore, Atlanta and the Mississippi Delta. These targeted areas are supposed to be the renaissance, or rather the genesis, of capitalism in communities with a predominance of blacks and others living in poverty. Such programs are certainly needed throughout the nation, but so far, this endeavor has been a complete flop. But is another federally funded flop a surprise? Not really when you consider that a nation whose theme is "do for self" will never be able to legislate or mandate a level playing field. In reality we are providing false hopes with this idea of empowerment zones.

Let's look at some of the main reasons why this concept is becoming yet another governmental "dry well."

A program just to have a program: Each administration seems to believe that it must come up with a new "hook" to designate its contribution to the future. It doesn't matter what the hook is. Enterprise zones, hundreds across the nation and none a success, were the precursor to empowerment zones. The failure of the former did not discourage the designers of the new venture. After all, it sounds good and gets good press. And, most importantly, the report card will come in long after the current administration is gone, so what the heck?

The "cooks" are incapable: The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), aka the House of Urban Decay, has proven itself to be incompetent at business development and economic development. The best business and job growth program at HUD has been its Section 3 initiative which is 29 years old and virtually ignored.

How is it going to institute a new high-powered program when it ignores the best one it has? Of all the federal agencies, the Department of Agriculture is probably the most institutionally racist; as a result, black farmers are an endangered species. Despite the above, guess who the main contributors to empowerment zones are? HUD and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It's a classic case of the foxes watching the hens. It just is not going to work! Why doesn't the Small Business Administration and the Dept. of Commerce oversee this program? Wouldn't that be logical?

No water in the well: The key to business growth and job production is capital access. However, empowerment zones are based mainly on tax abatements. What good are tax abatements if there is no revenue or

income to tax? The only businesses that will be attracted by tax breaks are viable, large businesses in pursuit of reinvestment with the luxury of tax avoidance. What does tax abatement mean to a business that has no start-up capital? Thus, the same problem that exists in stressed communities still lingers in these empowerment zones - no capital access. There is a lot of hype about financing, but when you get down to it, if there is no significant collateral or assets to leverage, it isn't going to happen.

Politicized Request for Proposals (RFP's): The seven empowerment zones were awarded to friends of the administration. Favorite mayors, congressmen, etc. were anointed. The "politicos" and business allies were given a shot, not the new entrepreneur. These included in Chicago-University of Chicago; Baltimore-John Hopkins University and the University of Maryland and in Detroit-Fortune 100 auto-related companies.

So, what in fact has taken place are business plans mildly adjusted to qualify for the tax abatements in the empowerment zones. Countless black entrepreneurs are being spurned by local empowerment zone committees because they simply have no local political ties or connections. Business development is outweighed by popular social initiatives.

I'm still asking for an example of an empowerment zone that has produced a certifiable new black-owned business that has in turn produced

40 new jobs. To date, it hasn't happened. There have been some businesses moving into empowerment zones to exploit the tax abatements, free rent, etc. but no new business. There is even a Kmart in New York, and Johnson Controls has moved into the hood of Detroit.

Each empowerment zone is looking at others to see how it's supposed to be done. I applaud the candor most of them show about their confusion, all except the example in Detroit where Mayor Dennis Archer is going around saying how great the city is doing with its empowerment zone. Don't believe it! Go there and check out the infrastructure that made this city infamous in the 70s and 80s. It's still there.

So what's the answer to this tricky problem? Capitalism is the key my brothers and sisters. Pure capitalism with a minimum of good government and an absence of typical politics.

So in the interest of a productive affluent society, will the business leaders please step forward and the politicians lay down their tools and go away?

Harry C. Alford is the president and CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

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