

COMMENTARY

Signs of hope exist despite a blind media

Special to Sentinel-Voice
If you only watch television uncritically and only know the stereotypes of young African-American men, you might believe they are all gang members and criminals.

But there are millions of young black men who are making positive contributions not only to their own communities, but to the whole nation.

LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman, two Chicago 18 year-olds are two of them. Jones and Newman have received a host of awards for their journalistic work which tells the story of their neighborhood. Newman

lives in the notorious Ida B. Wells housing project.

Their radio documentary, *Remorse: The 14 Stories of Eric Morse*, was aired on National Public Radio and told the story of Eric Morse, the 5 year-old who was pushed out a window by two boys, 10 and 11 years old, when he refused to steal candy for them. For this outstanding story Jones and Newman received the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, making them the youngest ever to receive the prestigious award and the first radio documentary to win the prize.

Working with journalist David Isay, Jones and Newman



won the grand prize over eight other journalists.

The two young men were not out looking for journalism prizes when they made the documentary.

"We were trying to help the community so that this won't happen again," said Newman

in a recent Jet magazine article. "To throw a 5 year-old out the window ... makes no sense," he added.

While they were happy to win the award, they believe that the cost was too high. "I'm still looking at the death of a 5 year-old, and for me to win an

award, I can't forget that," said Jones, adding, "If I could give that award back to bring Eric back, I would."

Jones and Newman interviewed their friends and neighbors about Eric Morse's death. They also talked to relatives of the victim and the suspects. Eric Morse's mother gave her only interview to the young men.

"She felt comfortable with us because she knew we would understand what she was going through. We come from the same environment," Newman explained.

The two boys who killed Eric were convicted and were

sentenced to a maximum security juvenile prison, becoming the nation's youngest children to be so sentenced.

In addition to the Robert Kennedy prize, Jones and Newman have also won a Peabody Award and a Hillman Foundation award for their documentary.

Their first radio documentary, *Ghetto Life 101*, done when they were 14 year-olds, won more than a dozen national and international awards. They have recently written a book, *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago*.

Barber says character assassination unnecessary

In light of recent newspaper articles addressing the contract between my daughter and the Clark County School District, I feel compelled to set the record straight.

These articles raise very important questions that must be addressed immediately if we are to create and maintain a positive and productive working relationship between the school board and the superintendent.

The first most important question is this: Why was the problem of my daughter's brief employment with the school district — assuming there is a problem — given to the press to solve?

If there was a concern with Karen Barber performing a temporary service for the school district, it could and should have been resolved with simple communication between the superintendent's staff and the school board.

The fact that the problem was not addressed at the in-house level raises several additional questions. Specifically, who decided to inform the press and what was the true motivation for releasing the information to the news media when the issue could have been resolved with simple in-house discussion and cooperation.

Following a telephone discussion with the Schools Superintendent Brian Cram regarding the newspaper's involvement in the employment issue, I received a fax from him on Dec. 10, stating that staff attorney's agreed that there was no problem.

But two days after the school board meeting to review the superintendent's performance, the Las Vegas Review-Journal published detailed article on the employment issue, which raises one final unanswered question: is there any relationship between the evaluation meeting and the release and/or the timing of the press report? I want to state unequivocally that I was not involved in any way in the district's decision to contact my daughter to render services.

Board counsel has advised me that I have done nothing illegal nor unethical. I certainly hope that the attempted character assassination that has surrounded this issue will now cease so I can concentrate on what I was elected to do — provide quality education for children.

Shirley Barber, Clark County School Board Trustee

Pity the consumer, black and white

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Take the latest controversy over the stunningly talented golfer Tiger Woods. Within hours after he had won the Masters Tournament, television commentators were debating the "meaning" of his triumph and of the public enthusiasm for it. On CNN's *Capitol Gang*, the Sunday night weekly political affairs talk show, Tiger's extraordinary performance was the big topic. Several commentators proclaimed that Wood's enormous popularity — which crossed racial lines — was an indicator that America was truly a "meritocracy" where talent, drive and accomplishment were revered and "trumped" race. Suddenly Tiger Woods was no longer a golfer, nor a black golfer, nor an incredibly famous and popular black golfer. He was a symbol of what these political



pundits — all of whom are white — are selling to the American people: That's the notion that America, deep down inside, is color blind. And that it should be.

Of course, the salesmanship did not stop there. By the day after the last round of the Masters, the black radio show phone lines were buzzing with commentary about Tiger Woods. Some were insistent that a most important feature of Tiger's game is that he is black. There was criticism of Woods' seeming unwillingness to emphasize his

African-American identity. The message was that Tiger and America were acting colorblind. And they shouldn't, because that denies racism.

This national dialogue on golf contains the two most pervasive sales pitches on race. For the white "salespeople," there is no racism. It's bad for business. For the black "salespeople," there is only racism.

If these are the positions of the "salesmen," what are the positions of ordinary black and white Americans on race? Like any consumers who go to the store, you can only buy what's on the shelf. Is it what we really want? Doesn't matter. It's what's for sale.

Dr. Lenora B. Fulani is currently a leading activist in the Reform Party and chairs the Committee for a Unified Independent Party.

American

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design, tokenism or, worse, exclusion, cannot be options for the most robustly diverse society in the history of humankind.

When you strip away all the disputes over statistics and missteps, the fundamental question facing our nation is the one that has always encompassed the centuries-old

American debate about freedom and equality of opportunity — about inclusion: Do we intend to make certain that all Americans share in the American Dream?

The lesson of American history — of all the groups in America, not just African-Americans — is that, whatever the opposition of the moment, the long term answer will be yes.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Quota opponents: Try again

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Sometimes people do things in the name of affirmative action that offend most others' sense of fairness, and thus they imperil programs that are utterly justifiable.



CARL ROWAN

A coalition of civil rights organizations has just ponied up some \$300,000 to settle a teacher-firing case that was handled atrociously by the Piscataway, N.J., school board.

Forced to fire one teacher for budgetary reasons, the board focused on a white teacher, Sharon Taxman, and a black one, Deborah Williams, both hired on the same day and with similar qualifications. It chose to fire the white teacher, then all hell broke loose.

The board could have explained that Deborah Williams had a master's degree, bonded marvelously with the students, and in their view brought more to the faculty.

Instead, it emphasized that Williams was the only black on the business faculty and said the board kept her to retain this bit of "diversity."

This Piscataway act was merely a personnel decision, not an affirmative action program in the real sense.

But the board's emphasis on race and the perception of a white woman being damaged unfairly were seized upon dramatically by the foes of affirmative action and diversity.

Taxman sued the school board and won.

This case fed the paranoid cries of those who argue that affirmative action always means taking away from deserving whites and giving to undeserving blacks.

Civil rights groups sensed losing proposition in courts dominated by conservative white males.

But even after losing in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit, the board chose to defend itself before the U.S. Supreme Court. But this was a terrible case, wrongly perceived by the public and wrongly argued by the school board's lawyers, and doomed to certain defeat before this conservative Supreme Court.

It threatened to provoke court strictures against the very best of voluntary and even private affirmative action programs.

So the civil rights groups had no choice other than to get this case out of the Supreme Court and wait for one where affirmative action is more defensible.

Many colleges can learn a lot from this case. Even while asserting truthfully that high school grades and standardized test scores are not the only basis for admission decisions, some universities formalized policies that say such things as "consider all whites with SATs above 1200," but "consider all blacks with SATs above 1000."

I know that this is an admission of the truth that minorities have been cheated in education for generations, and that this and their environments still impact negatively on their test scores, creating an under-statement of their potential.

But having different parameters of acceptable scores is a red flag and it creates unnecessary animosity.

Double standards invite howls of "racial quotas" from both demagogues and fair-minded people, and they give affirmative action a bad name at a time when this society needs it so badly.