

# AN AFFRONT TO THE BLACK PRESS

On Friday, October 30, 1998, a full page advertisement appeared in USA Today encouraging African Americans to vote on November 3, 1998.

The advertisement read: "The Black Leadership Forum, Inc. and Black Entertainment Television, Inc. urge African Americans to vote on November 3, 1998 for the political party whom you believe will deliver results on: improved education, quality health care, jobs, affirmative action, sentencing parity for drug convictions, equal justice for all, and fair urban and rural policies." The ad carried a photo of Bob Johnson, President of BET, surrounded by African American leaders who participated in a BET press conference. The ad also listed 21 national African American organizations affiliated with the Black Leadership Forum, including (without our permission) the National Newspaper Publishers Association.

This advertisement prompted immediate response, angry response from African American publishers who are members of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the trade group for the more than 200 African American newspapers. There are several reasons for their anger.

**Number one:** While African American newspapers were carrying free editorials and op-ed articles for the past several weeks on the critical election issues at stake for us and imploring our readers and their families to vote on election day, our newspapers did not receive a penny for national advertising from any source.

**Number two:** The fact that the Black Leadership Forum and BET decided to spend approximately \$67,000 for a one-page ad in a white newspaper (which is not read by the masses of African Americans) is an insult to African American publishers, who are struggling small business enterprises. The Black Leadership Forum and BET did not run a similar ad in a single African American newspaper. We take issue as to the sincerity of such an effort that was supposedly targeted to reach African Americans and we ask the question who "really" was the ad designed to reach?

**Number three:** NNPA has been battling the U.S. Federal Government, the Department of Housing & Urban Development and the White House Office of Drug Policy, in particular, for receiving \$195 million appropriated by the U.S. Congress for a national education campaign, and in the first phase placed advertising in white media exclusively in 12 cities, half of which had large African American populations. For years, the Black press has been fighting Fortune 500 companies which depend on African American consumers for their profit margins, but ignore doing business with African American newspapers.

Some of our publishers have described the USA Today ad as "shameful" and demand an apology from Bob Johnson, President of BET and from the Black Leadership Forum and its members for such a conspicuous affront to African American newspapers which have been in the business of representing our people since 1827. We can expect whites to spend their funds with white media, but not for African Americans to do the same, while spending not a penny with their own media, it is, indeed, shameful!

**Mrs. Dorothy Leavell,  
President, National Newspaper Publishers Association**