

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Flag flap breeds unity among civil rights groups

In a needed show of solidarity, two of the nation's premiere civil rights groups have joined the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization in punishing South Carolina for still flying the Confederate flag.

Two weeks ago, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People voted to boycott the state. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference followed suit, canceling a 2,500-member convention in Charleston. "We will urge every organization and corporation who loves justice to join this effort to push America back from the brink of senseless tribalism," said SCLC President Martin Luther King III, son of the Rev. Martin Luther King. "We cannot, at this point in history, resurrect ghosts of the past and allow the resurgence of racism, discrimination and the politics of resentment that the Confederate flag reclaims."

The SCLC's three-day convention was to begin this week. The group planned the convention in Charleston to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the local hospital workers' strike. According to Lanneau Sciglig, former chairman of the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, the SCLC pullout could cost the city hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The economic hit isn't likely to cripple Charleston but it might put some heat under the foot of Gov. Jim Hodges, who supports removing the flag but hasn't taken any definitive action because flag supporters in the General Assembly wield powerful influence.

Joining the NAACP and SCLC, the Urban League also boycotted the state, pulling its regional meeting. If nothing, such a show of solidarity lets the nation know that civil rights groups can unite to fight.

With a virtual whitewash of ethnic faces in the upcoming fall television season, we would do well to turn off the boob-tube and engage in other pursuits.

The NAACP called attention to the issue during its recent New York convention. Of the 26 new shows set to air on ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox, none feature minorities in leading roles and few have minorities in recurring secondary roles.

Advertisers have chosen to ignore the non-white demographic, preferring to pander to the "upscale market" — a coded term describing white males aged 18 to 49 with generous amounts of discretionary income. Apparently the \$650 billion economic engine that is Black America isn't worth coddling.

While the networks and advertisers need their feet held to the fire for what NAACP president and CEO Kweisi Mfume called a "glaring omission," an "outrage and a shameful display by network executives, who are either clueless, careless, or both," we should also take this opportunity to circle the wagons and deal with other problems.

Blacks watch more television than any ethnic group. Time spent idling in front of the television can be used to read a book, write a letter to the editor, learn a game, play a sport, paint, draw, exercise, sing, counsel, console, dance, cook, create, visit, volunteer, pray, share.

Instead of looking at this as a total defeat — though it is disheartening that in 1999 and with oodles of spending power that non-whites than are still second-class citizens — we should use this, as an opportunity to better ourselves.



TV boycott should extend to all media

Barbara Reynolds
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Television is neither black and white nor is it in living color anymore. It has degenerated into a drab shade of gray. Thankfully, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is attacking the shading out of people of color in the fall lineup of sitcoms and dramatic programming.

It is backing up the rhetoric with threats to call on Blacks to turn off the tube and to boycott the advertisers that are fueling the "black and brown-out."

While the NAACP is urgently needed, it is not going far enough because virtually everything being said about network programming can also be said about television news, radio and the print media.

At the NAACP convention in New York a few weeks ago, Kweisi Mfume showed how the ongoing erasure of Black faces in the media are affecting the fall lineup. Not one of the 26 new shows set to air on ABC, CBS, NBC or Fox star an African-American. Blacks, as well as Hispanics, aren't playing many secondary roles either.

"When the TV viewing public sits down to watch new prime-time shows scheduled for this fall, they will see a virtual whitewash," Mfume said. "This glaring omission is an outrage and a shameful display by network executives, who are either clueless, careless or both."

Unfortunately, the trend of erasing Blacks has been

gaining momentum for several years as advertisers both in the print and broadcast media as well as news officials chase the so-called upscale demographics.

For instance, last season's top five entertainment shows: "ER," "Friends," "Frasier," "Veronica's Closet" and "Jesse" were principally white shows with a sprinkling of prominent minority characters. Advertisers generally regard "upscale" White males aged 18 to 49 as the most desirable — and for some crazy reason — disregard the \$650 billion that Blacks gross annually.

In recent years, sitcoms with a positive message such as "Amen," "A Different World," "227," "Fresh Prince," and "The Jeffersons" have been canceled. In fact, one of the ways I knew a show didn't have much of a chance was if I liked it.

For a long-time I viewed the changes as personal. I live in fear that network devils at CBS pull the cord when they figure out that "Touched by An Angel's" high-ratings are partly because of the superb acting of Della Reese.

Mfume is calling on Blacks — who are becoming the vanishing species on television — to turn off the tube.

Actually they are already turning off network sitcoms anyway and going to cable. Only six of last season's networks shows ranked in the Top 20 among Black households. Conversely, the top rated show in Black households, "The Steve Harvey Show" on WB,

ranked No. 154 in White households, according to BBDO, a New York ad agency that studies viewing habits.

In attempting to break the colorline, the NAACP shouldn't stop with network programming. It should forcefully call on the networks' news departments, public TV shows and cable stations to drop their ban on Black talking-heads, the punditocracy.

On major talk shows like CNN's "Capital Gang" and public television's "Washington's Week In Review," Black faces are also scarce. Public affairs or news shows have been ethnically cleansed of Black and Brown viewpoints. Unless there is a Black-oriented issue or an issue whites want to associate with Blacks such as crime, Black experts are rarely used.

Monitor "Nightline," for example, to see how that rule is enforced. Moreover, when there is a White House news conference look to see how White the news gatherers are. TV news-talk is a matter of

whites talking about white-folks affairs with blacks only able to listen over the back fence.

In the workplace, the racial situation is just as bad. A recent American Society of Newspaper Editors showed that 48 percent of newspapers hire no people of color. Many of the major newspapers employ no Black or Hispanic editorial writers, and those they do hire are pressured to pen conservative opinions.

If Mfume's rhetoric is not empty, he will include broadcasters in his threats to go to the source — the advertisers, who are allowed to disrespect the \$650 billion Blacks spend annually on consumer goods.

The Federal Communications Commission recently released a study showing that advertisers are discriminating against broadcasters and stations that serve minority advertisers.

Data for 3,745 radio stations across the country concluded that those who program for minority

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