

## COMMENTARY

## Blacks progressing? Depends who you ask

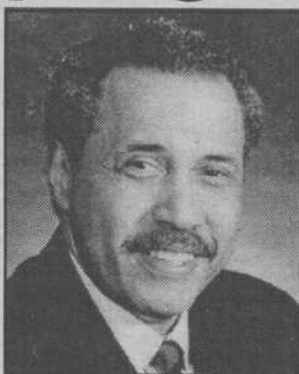
By Louie Overstreet

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Why do we, as African-Americans, allow others and not ourselves to define what constitutes progress for our people?

The "talking heads" on the ubiquitous networks and cable television shows, which provide social, political and economic commentary about life in America, are dominated by middle-aged white males. The ones that come most readily to mind are those on "The Capital Gang," "McLaughlin Group" and "Meet the Press."

When the issue for the day is "blackfolks," whether liberal or conservative, they are very comfortable pointing out how much progress persons of color have made in America. Invariably, they cite elimination of discrimination in public accommodations, social integration, and the increase in the number of



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blacks holding elective office. Rarely is there any talk of economics in a black context.

Unfortunately, we have allowed ourselves to be deluded by others telling us how well we are doing, to the extent that many of us have been "brainwashed" into believing the saying: "in America we are all just alike." It seems the thought never crosses our minds that if we are alike in America, then why aren't we all treated alike?

Since around 1975, too many of us have allowed ourselves to get caught up in the revelry of being able to go where we want and to vote (occasionally) for whom we want, that we have not maintained the vigil necessary to assure hard fought gains are sustained.

I am of the opinion, contrary, as usual, that the surface signs of progress, as defined by others in a number of instances, have served to coat over a number of negative side effects. By doing so, we have allowed some monumental impediments to be placed in our path to progress. Our partying over some small progress that has been enjoyed by the dominant culture for countless scores of years has lessened our resolve to struggle so that we may continue to progress, and it has also had a divisive effect on our sense of oneness.

When I contrast the words

and deeds of our leaders of the 1950s and 1960s with those of our self-centered leaders of today, namely: Kweisi Mfume, Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, no wonder things "ain't" the same.

Matters are further complicated by the attitude of arrogance based on ignorance possessed by many of us who benefited mightily from the struggle. We falsely and foolishly assume that the station we enjoy in an integrated society is permanent and is the result of our being self-made men and women.

This attitudinal impediment does not allow us to have an appreciation for cause and effect relationships. We do not understand that the only reason we had beauty contest winners in the 1980s and 1990s is that many black women paid some heavy dues in previous generations. Most of these unidentified and unsung champions of our march

of progress as a people could not win a beauty contest even if their own "mommas" were the judges.

Those of us who had or presently have jobs in corporate America do not associate our "spook by the door" status with the struggles waged by black organizations before some of us were even born.

Thus, we do not feel a need to support any black organization or form alliances with brown, yellow, red and white groups who are concerned with the future of our nation.

The next impediment we have failed to deal with is the type of black political appointee who has this unexplained need to serve as an apologist for the aspirations of blacks.

They continually sugarcoat and minimize our concerns by telling white politicians what they feel comfortable hearing and not telling

them what they need to know.

However, the biggest impediment to our real progress has been the failure of black businesses.

A generation ago, blacks had little trouble raising capital from a variety of sources to run businesses that catered to blacks, now it is "damn near" impossible to get capital to run a business that caters to an integrated society.

We failed to understand that eating in a restaurant was not the important thing, but having the money to own the eatery was the main thing.

Now we look around and discover to our chagrin that since we did not maintain the proper vigil, we have integrated everything except that which matters the most in a capitalistic society, the money!

If you remember my column from last week, I promised you that I was not going to change, right?

## Lopez not the only person Blacks need to harangue

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The instant word hit the street that actress-singer Jennifer Lopez had used a racial epithet in one version of her new single, "I'm real," Black protesters hit the barricades. The fact Lopez is of Puerto Rican ancestry made no difference. The protesters demanded that Lopez apologize, and that Epic Records pull the record.

The Lopez flap has by now become part of a well-worn pattern. A non-Black celebrity, politician, or sports figure slips, or intentionally uses a racially-offensive word or makes any other racist reference. They immediately hear about it from outraged Blacks. Cincinnati Reds owner, Marge Schott, sports personalities, Al Campanis and Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder, former Atlanta Braves star John Rucker, author Pat Conroy, and California Lieutenant Governor, Cruz Bustamante were publicly crucified for making racially insensitive remarks, or for using the "N" word. They quickly do their mea-culpas, and they hope and pray that their careers aren't ruined.

The problem is that many of the Blacks now raging at Lopez, and others who casually toss around racially

loaded words, do not unleash the same fury on Blacks using the same words. In the crossover world of hip-hop culture that Lopez hails from the use of racially offensive words has become a high art. Lopez has certainly heard legions of Black comedians and rappers punctuate every line in their rap lyrics and comedy lines with those words, especially the "N" word, ad nauseum. In fact, we don't have to guess about whether her ears were sullied by the word. Her scandal-plagued, ex-soul mate, rap kingpin, Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs (now self-renamed "P. Diddy"), once led a concert crowd in the chant "F...you Nig..." And fellow rapper, Ja Rule, who's Black, co-wrote the controversial song, and does a duet with Lopez on the cut.

Lopez also has certainly read or heard of the many Black writers, and filmmakers who go through lengthy gyrations to justify using the word. Their rationale boils down to this, the more a Black person uses the "N" word, the less offensive it becomes. They claim that they are cleansing the word of its negative connotations so that racists can no longer use it to hurt Blacks.

Comedian-turned-activist Dick Gregory had the same

idea some years ago when he titled his autobiography, with this racial epithet. Gregory has since denounced the use of the word, and those Blacks who use it.

Many Blacks say they use the "N" word endearingly or affectionately. Still, others are defiant. They say they don't care what a White person calls them. Words can't harm them.

The Black "N word" defenders miss the point. Words are not value neutral. They express concepts and ideas. Words reflect society's standards. If color-phobia is one of its most powerful standards, then emotionally laden racist words easily reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes. And a hyper-racially charged word such as the "N" word does precisely that.

It is the most hurtful and enduring symbol of racial oppression. It has a grotesque history.

Before World War I, many major magazines and newspapers reinforced the status of Blacks as racial pariahs by routinely using racially offensive words to describe them. The NAACP and Black newspaper editors waged vocal campaigns against this racist stereotyping.

Racially offensive words (See Lopez, Page 10)

## NAACP executive blasts president at annual confab

By Ronald Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Arriving at the recent NAACP Convention in New Orleans, it was clear that Julian Bond, chair of the board, had taken the theme of the conference literally and launched a series of verbal grenades at the White House. In case you missed it, here is a little of what he said about George Bush:

"He has selected nominees from the Taliban wing of American politics, appeased the wretched appetites of the extreme right wing, and chosen Cabinet officials whose devotion to the Confederacy is nearly canine in its uncritical affection. The president who promised to unite, not divide, chose as secretary of the Interior a woman who opposed racially equitable scholarships and regarded slavery as a set of bad facts?"

"That carried too great a loss for states' rights. She refused to defend her state's support of a business fairness program. She and the new attorney general have opposed legally sanctioned remedies for racial discrimination. The president who promised to unite, not divide, selected as the nation's top law enforcement officer a man who doesn't believe in many of the civil rights laws he has sworn to enforce—affirmative action, racial profiling, hate crimes, voting rights— notwithstanding his confirmation conversion when he repudiated everything he believed in yesterday and promised to support the very laws he had fought so hard to destroy."

Bond surely knew that he would get a rise from the White House, and a few hours after uttering these incendiary phrases, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer pronounced them too extreme, saying that Bond had "gone too far." But he had gone too far for whom?

He had not gone too far when one considers the objective fact that Black voters were steaming about the results of the last presidential election in Florida and in other places, and yet, Bush put not one nickel in the budget for election reform and has given no leadership to the issue.

The news gets even worse: The Washington Post released a study shortly after the convention which revealed that the pressure which the Republican put on willing Florida officials to have the military overseas vote register for Bush largely worked, to the point that many illegal ballots were cast for Bush.

This continued knowledge that the election was tainted is, no doubt, one of the reasons why Bush has steadfastly ignored the civil rights leadership this year, after speaking at the NAACP convention last year in the heat of the campaign in an attempt to neutralize their strong opposition to his agenda. Yet he has met with the Congressional Black Caucus, but in a meeting described as "polite" and "restrained" and which was more symbolic than substantive. And he has avoided the mainline Black religious leadership while offering a national program on "faith-based" social services, seeking leadership from the head of smaller local Black churches.

Bond apparently did not go too far for Blacks as a whole, when one considers the public opinion surveys that came out the same week he made this speech. A Washington Post/Kaiser Foundation/Harvard University survey on race relations, released the week of July 8, found that while 65 percent of Whites approved of the job George Bush was doing as president, only 29 percent of Blacks approved. The sub-

(See Bond, Page 10)