

## COMMENTARY

# In defense of credible presidential hopefuls

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Let me say up front that, contrary to recent reports in some major newspapers, I am not signing on as an adviser to Al Sharpton's campaign for the Democratic nomination for president of the United States. This represents no rejection of Sharpton; rather it is a rejection of the exhausting process involved in a presidential campaign, after having served in both of Jesse Jackson's bids for the presidency. Thus, if I defend certain aspects of Sharpton's campaign, it should be clear that I am being paid by it.

So, while I am talking about Sharpton's "defense," let me say that I do have a sense of *de ja vu*, hearing commentator after commentator question whether Sharpton has the credibility to become president of the United States—when we have a George Bush in the White House! In 1984, when Jackson ran, Ronald Reagan was president. He had spent most of his career as an actor and being managed by a small political clique of advisers while he was governor of California. Even then, it was laughable to me that these same commentators questioned whether Jackson had the knowledge and experience to be president.

Well, much of this questioning is just racist, in that either they doubt Black intellectual capacity or do not want to see America symbolically represented by Blacks, especially a liberal Black preacher. The issue of credentials is a sham, first because there are many people who have run for the highest-elected office who had

no previous electoral experience, and their credibility was not questioned. For example, Ross Perot and Malcolm Forbes had money, but no political experience. Yet they were viewed as credible presidential candidates. Second, there have been plenty of people who have won election to both houses of congress who had no previous political experience.

The job of president is not merely comprised of the leadership of one man; the decisions that come from the White House are most often the collective results of paid staff and unpaid experts, unseen friends and advisers—even relatives, such as fathers or wives. In short, it is the institution of the presidency that shapes the decisions that govern the country. The president must have the courage and judgment to manage the institution, but then, who doubts that either Jackson, Sharpton or Carol Moseley-Braun could do that, since they have done the things to reach the plateau of consideration. That is why we have most often had such mediocre presidents and why many of the sharpest people in the Black community could have done much better in the job.

Colin Powell has been on many people's list for president of the United States, but not only because he has the credentials, mostly because he thinks like those in power and he is their collaborator, even their servant. In fact, he gives enormous cover to many Whites who put Powell in the class of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas: they can't be racist because they support at least one Black person for high

(See Walters, Page 12)

# United States must move beyond Jackson

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
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I could not put my finger on it until my wife's co-worker observed that during Black History Month, the Black person receiving the most attention on network television was Michael Jackson. What, she asked, does this say about the way that the United States looks at us as a people?

It could not have been put better. Don't get me wrong: I love Michael Jackson's music. I cannot take anything away from his talent. Yet the guy gives me the creeps. Actually, I find myself feeling very sorry for him. But what was he thinking when he remade himself? Yet, during February/Black History Month, this mixed up, not-so-young-anymore performer received hours and hours of attention in the national media. This attention while Black jazz performers fight for a modicum of the time and exposure that Jackson receives.

Michael Jackson has moved from the category of an unusually talented performer to simply being unusual. He is a spectacle for people to come and observe. He is the source of endless speculation and gossip. But during Black History Month, could not network television have found a bit of time to explore other aspects of the African-American experience?

Take, for instance, W.E.B. DuBois, one of the most brilliant scholars of the 20th century. In 2003, we mark both the 100th anniversary of the publication of his monumental work, "The Souls of Black Folk," as well as the commemoration of 40 years since he passed away. Or, how about the

life and work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, one of the foremost leaders in the struggle against lynching in the early 20th century? Perhaps we could have been treated to an examination of the evolution of rap/hip hop from its origins in the music and poetry of the 1960s Black Power movement into a transformative art form on the international cultural scene.

The contributions of African-Americans, not to mention Africans on the continent and in the rest of the Diaspora, are worthy of nearly endless discussion. Yet the focus on the Black face in the small box is more often than not connected with sports, slapstick comedy, and with being spectacles. When we get serious attention, it is on public television or on certain cable stations, or when we rebel, but there is even a limit to that. Our complaints on these matters, to the extent to which we raise our voices, regularly go unanswered. At best, the resident Negro is brought forward to apologize and explain the market constraints that limit their ability to...

The challenge, then, seems to return to us as a people and particularly to the Black media. Having special events in our communities during Black History Month is all well and good, but entirely insufficient. Part of the problem is that such events fail to attract enough of our youth. Black newspapers and magazines can do more. There need to be more articles or sections of our publications addressing African-American history and culture. Even Tom Joyner's "Little Known Black History Fact," for the

(See Fletcher, Page 12)

# Sitting on both sides of the affirmative action fence

By George E. Curry  
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The *amici curiae*, or friend-of-the-court, brief filed with the United States Supreme Court by Fortune 500 companies in support of the University of Michigan's affirmative action programs extols the value of affirmative action at the university level and in corporate America.

"In the practical experience of the amici businesses, the need for diversity in higher education is indeed compelling," the companies state. "Because our population is diverse, and because of the increasingly global reach of American business, the skills and training needed to succeed in business today demand exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas and viewpoints. Employees at every level of an organization must be able to work effectively with people who are different from themselves. Amici need the talent and creativity of a workforce that is as diverse as the world around it."

Among the 65 companies signing the brief were ChevronTexaco Corp., Pfizer Inc., Xerox Corp. and

the Altria Group Inc., which was known until this year as Philip Morris Cos. Inc. That those companies were signatories is not surprising.

What is surprising—and unacceptable—is that these same companies that want to be applauded for their support of affirmative action also donate funds to the Center for Individual Rights, the conservative public interest law firm that brought the suits against the University of Michigan on behalf of rejected White applicants.

In a forthcoming book, "The Assault on Diversity: An Organized Challenge to Racial and Gender Justice," by Lee Cokorinos, the Washington-based Center for Individual Rights was described as "perhaps the most politically extreme of the groups challenging affirmative action, civil rights, and racial equality in the United States today."

This is the same organization that litigated on behalf of Cheryl Hopwood against the University of Texas, a decision that led to outlawing affirmative action programs in Texas and the states in that judicial

circuit. It filed a similar class-action suit against the University of Washington seeking to abolish its affirmative action program but was unsuccessful. It successfully defended Proposition 209, the ballot initiative that outlawed affirmative action in California.

"CIR's strategy is divisive," writes Cokorinos, the research director at the Institute for Democratic Studies, a liberal research and education think tank in New York. "In nearly all of its high profile cases involving alleged favoritism toward African-Americans and Latinos, the lead plaintiffs have been white women—a two-edged sword: undermining the idea that women have likewise benefited from affirmative action, and co-opting the vocabulary of the civil rights movement in order to undermine historic public concern about the effect of discrimination against racial minorities."

According to the CIR's annual reports, it has also filed suits that:

- Assert that the use of epithets in the workplace should be viewed as constitutionally-protected free

speech;

- Oppose a consent decree that allowed the University of Minnesota to distribute \$3 million to female faculty members because of gender disparities in salary;

- Challenge the Voting Rights Act provisions that called for the creation of voting rights districts that do not lessen the chance of a person of color exercising political power, and

- Oppose the 1994 Violence Against Women Act.

CIR raises the bulk of its money from conservative foundations that routinely fund many of the Right-wing think tanks. It also collects donations from Fortune 500 companies who play both sides of the fence, hoping not to be exposed.

Cokorinos writes in his book, "CIR's budget was \$1.4 million in 2000. Corporate donors include Archer Daniels Midland Corp., ARCO Foundation, Chevron USA, Adolph Coors Foundation, Pfizer Inc., Philip Morris Cos. and Philip Morris USA, Texaco, USX Corporation, and the Xerox Foundation."

These companies can't have it

both ways. They are either for us or against us. If they are against us, we should be against them.

We like to boast of having spending power that exceeds \$645 billion each year. Where are we spending all that money? Should we be spending it with firms that underwrite—partly with our dollars—conservative think tanks whose primary mission is to eradicate affirmative action and any other program designed to help people who've been locked out of society because of their color, sex or national origin? The list shouldn't stop there; it should also include the companies that did not go on record in support of the University of Michigan.

And where are our so-called leaders on this issue? Why aren't they speaking up? Have they literally taken hush money? Are you still with us on this issue Jesse? Mufume? Hugh? C. DeLores? Rev. Al? Where are the student activists? If our leaders can't lead on this issue, maybe it's time to get some new ones.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief on the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.