

## C O M M E N T A R Y

## 2003 graduates: How will history remember you?

By Louie Overstreet

Special to Sentinel-Voice

In our constantly changing nation, I am issuing a challenge to the graduates of the Class of 2003 to take an active role in bringing about a change in our society.

While it is recognized that change is constant, such transformation can be for better or worse.

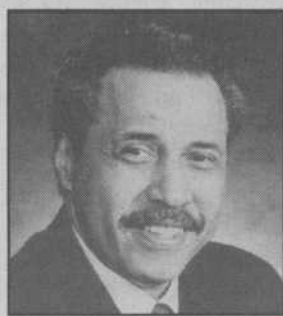
When I graduated from high school, the state of our nation was as follows:

We were fighting a "cold war" against the Soviet Union. Public accommodations for people of my racial group were not available in the South. JFK had not been elected president. A person had to be 21 to vote yet only 18 years of age to die in combat. People wore hats, not caps turned around on their heads, to sporting events. People smoked cigarettes at their place of work. There were no high-tech cellphones. Computers were the size of small houses. HIV and AIDS had not surfaced.

By the time I finished my requirements for a degree (with a major in partying and a minor in civil engineering), many changes had occurred in our society. It was a summer of protests and riots. Students and faculty on many college campuses were protesting the Vietnam War, and a number of our American cities were in flames, including Chicago, Detroit, Newark and my hometown of Cleveland.

It also was the year I was bitten by the political bug and I volunteered time on Carl Stokes' campaign for mayor of Cleveland.

I can't help but feel something went wrong between my generation, which advocated social justice through nonviolent and violent protest and community empowerment through political activism, and



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the one you will be defining in the coming years.

The "me generation" that came into prominence in the mid-1980s can best be described by its selfish pursuits that turned our nation into one without an ethical rudder. In the first decade of the new millennium, our society is feeling the effects of a dis-

regard for ethics by a number of people in charge of our nation's government and business. I believe the "me generation's" self-obsession has harmed our country.

Consider: The U.S. Supreme Court is doing everything within its considerable powers to reverse the civil rights gains of the 1960s. A record number of businesspeople are being convicted of "white-collar" crimes. Religious fanatics are making asinine statements about people who have HIV or AIDS as being punished by God. And the plight of the homeless is being discussed in dispassionate terms by unenlightened politicians who have even gone so far as to say that our fellow citizens are unpatriotic.

This characterization is particularly troubling since many of the homeless are Vietnam-era veterans.

Class of 2003, you are inheriting a mess! What mess, you ask? I will share two examples:

The consequences of inconsistent and often incoherent foreign policy objectives have caused us to become so fearful of personal harm that we are willing to give up personal liberties. These were guaranteed by the founding documents of our nation that in the intervening 200-plus years so many have given their lives to preserve.

As a nation, we lock up a greater per-

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## White media can't see beyond leaders' skin color

By George E. Curry

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The failure to distinguish between former New York Times reporter Jayson Blair's plagiarism and his race—which should be irrelevant to his misbehavior—is part of a larger problem the White-owned media has in how it depicts African-Americans, especially Black leaders.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a New York-based group that monitors the media, has issued a report titled, "Disrespect, Distortion and Double Blinds: Media Treatment of Progressive Black Leaders." Written by Jacqueline Bacon, the report cites example after example of how reporters let their personal biases slip into stories about Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and Cornel West.

"Discussing these public figures on the opinion pages, critics often use demeaning terms, with some labels ridiculing these Africa-American spokespersons for seeking to be public figures in the first place," the report observes.

It continues, "Jesse Jackson is a 'publicity hound,' declared Mickey Edwards of the Boston Herald (4/18/01) and Steve Barrett of the Chattanooga Times/Free Press (9/13/02). In a similar vein, the New York Observer (4/29/02) pronounced Cornel West a 'publicity-loving con man.'

At times, more explicitly racial terms are used for ridicule, as when Rod Dreher of the National Review Online (1/4/02) pronounced West a 'clownish minstrel.' Such slurs do nothing to advance debate about these figures' ideas. Indeed, they serve to dismiss their message before any real consideration of the issues they raise."

Some journalists echo demeaning terms, as if they're reading from a script.

"Jackson is a 'race hustler,' according to Don Feder (Boston Herald, 1/2/02) and Phil Kent (Augusta Chronicle, 1/28/01). George Will (Washington Post, 10/21/01) and the Washington Times (6/20/00) apply the same label to Sharpton; John J. Miller (National Review, 10/14/02) uses it to describe both men. Jackson and Sharpton's discussion of racism, such treatment suggests, are not legitimate critiques of society, but rather fraudulent attempts to trick the white public."

The FAIR report observes that African-American leaders receive unfair treatment from both Black and White commentators.

Rather than address the messages of African-American leaders, commentators often belittle their appearance or speech. Instead of offering principled consideration of Sharpton's protest of U.S.

military exercises in Vieques, Puerto Rico, for which he spent time in jail, Stanley Crouch (New York Daily News, 6/1/01) offered a trivializing reference to Sharpton's appearance: 'I think he may be more concerned about his time behind bars because he might not be able to get his hair done.'

"Similarly, Philip Terzian (Providence Journal, 1/26/03) notes sarcastically of Sharpton's potential candidacy, 'With his jumpsuits, medallions, bigoted pronouncements, flowing John C. Calhoun locks and historic attachment to the Tawana Brawley hoax, Sharpton could not be a more suitable Democratic candidate.'"

Of course, Terzian did not give any examples of Sharpton's supposed "bigoted pronouncements" or provide any serious discussion of the issues Sharpton has raised. Besides, as the report points out, Sharpton has been "wearing three-piece suits at public appearances for some time now."

In a review of Al Sharpton's book, "Al on America," Rod Dreher accused Sharpton of taking positions "without a semblance of sustained, fact-based argument." In one chapter, however, Sharpton discusses teacher salaries, parental in-

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## Graduation caps, gowns and affirmative action—all intertwined

By Ron Walters

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Like many proud parents and relatives this time of year, I found myself at a graduation celebration, as my niece-in-law graduated from the University of Florida Medical School. It was interesting not only because actor Michael J. Fox gave a moving speech about his fight against Parkinson's disease, but because the graduating class was more than 60 percent students of color. This gave me a sense of the potential future of the medical profession, provided Black, Hispanic and East Indian and other Asian students are admitted according to their numbers in the population and their application rate.

In 2003, although 12.3 percent of the population is

Black and another 12.5 percent is Hispanic, they make up only 2.5 percent and 3.4 percent of physicians respectively. This is behind the growth curve, since in 2001, 7.2 percent of medical students were Black and 6.4 percent were Hispanic. This represented a slight growth since 1992 of 1.6 percent for Blacks and 0.5 percent for Hispanics. In other words, Black and Hispanics are growing as a proportion of the medical school enrollment, but ever so slowly. In this respect the University of Florida is not typical of the rest of the country.

This situation for Asians is somewhat complicated, since in California universities their enrollment rate is greater than the rates of either Blacks or Hispanics and

equal to Whites in many state institutions. This has led to the charge that Asians are a casualty of affirmative action because medical schools place a silent quota on their admission.

Nevertheless, conservatives are working overtime to launch a chilling effect on the enrollment of Blacks, Hispanics and other students of color. Just last month, the so-called Center for Equal Opportunity and the American Civil Rights Institute wrote to colleges across the country challenging them to eliminate race-specific programs. Their confidence that such programs are unconstitutional, or at the very least hard to defend in a conservative judicial atmosphere, was buttressed by the attitude of the Office of Civil Rights in

the Department of Education. The office sent out a letter saying that such race-specific programs should be "narrowly tailored" and that in any case, it was doubtful that they would withstand judicial scrutiny.

The result was that some institutions, such as MIT and Princeton, have eliminated their summer programs for math and science enrichment, which targeted upgrading the skills of Black and Hispanic students. Thus, intimidation has worked, since the officials of these institutions say that they have received no letters challenging their program, but fear that if a complaint is registered against them with the Office of Civil Rights, or with the courts, it would be upheld.

There is a vital link be-

tween such science enrichment programs and the ability of Black and Hispanic students to continue to enroll and graduate successfully in medical or other science-based careers.

The growth of Blacks and Hispanics in the medical sciences is especially important, since disproportionately, these students say that they will practice in medically under-served areas. The facts show that this is the case. But rather than make it difficult for Black and Hispanic students to gain medical education, a wise public policy would be to launch a Marshall Plan to fund the education of such students in order to greatly enhance access to medical care in under-served communities.

An irony is that some of

our political leaders are talking about fixes for the health care delivery system and providing health insurance for all Americans. But the most important plan will take into account the availability of medical personnel in communities of color that have a disproportionate share of the poor and needy. Many studies have documented the existence of racism in the health care delivery system, such that there will be no fixing of the system without an increase in the number of those who practice medicine among people in their own communities.

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