

# 'Quiet giant' Gilliam left humanitarian legacy

By Marc H. Morial  
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When James H. Gilliam, Jr., of Wilmington, Delaware, died suddenly in late August, the local media was filled with words of sorrow and praise from the state's prominent politicians and business leaders.

Senator Joseph Biden, Delaware Governor Ruth Ann Minner, and Wilmington Mayor James M. Baker, along with the chief executives of several of Delaware's largest corporations, offered heartfelt words of condolence for a man who they knew well and whose resume glittered with high-level, multi-career achievement.

But many of the specifics of the shower of praise for Jim Gilliam Jr. made clear that the best description of him wasn't "business titan," or "political kingmaker," but:

community leader.

A man who used his positions in the high councils of business and politics to expand opportunities for others and to bridge the various divides that separate communities, Gilliam preferred, Mayor Baker told the *Wilmington News Journal*, "working behind the scenes and did not need any of the 'out front' glory."

He was a quiet giant in the field of civic engagement.

Jim Gilliam, Jr., only 58 at his death, was a lawyer and a banker who had worked for several prestigious law firms and corporations. Appointed in 1977 by then-Governor Pete du Pont as his Secretary of Community Affairs and Economic Development, he was the first African-American to reach such a high post in the state's political hierarchy, and remained politically

## To Be Equal

By Marc H. Morial  
President and CEO  
National Urban League



well-connected and respected throughout his life. A trustee of several large corporations, he was also an astute commercial developer, a co-partner in the office and retail complex proposed for a prime parcel of Wilmington's downtown.

Jim Gilliam, Jr. was the kind of person without whom no viable community — or neighborhood — can flourish. He employed his considerable ambition and talents to not only make a better life

for himself, but also used them to make a better life for others, and not just those on the fast track to personal success like himself.

He was deeply involved in civic work at national, state and local levels — as a trustee of the National Geographic Society and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute; as a board member of several foundations, charitable organizations, and colleges; as a past chairman of the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce; and as co-chair and a major contributor to the capital campaign of his undergraduate alma mater, Morgan State University.

But Jim Gilliam, Jr.'s reach extended below the radar screen, so to speak, of this level of civic engagement, directly into Wilmington's impoverished neighborhoods, according to Wilmington city councilman Norman Oliver.

"Guys in the local neigh-

borhoods aren't used to getting in touch with guys on that level," Oliver, speaking of Gilliam's involvement, "He's a role model for all of us..."

And Jim Gilliam, Jr.'s civic engagement is a family trait. His parents, James, Sr. and Louise Hayley Gilliam, are legendary civic leaders in Wilmington. In fact, Jim Gilliam, Sr., a former national trustee of the National Urban League, was instrumental four years ago in helping establish our affiliate in that city, the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League.

Senator Biden recognized the work of the Gilliam family when he said Jim, Jr. "had his father's passion about equity and civil rights and fair play and he had his mother's equilibrium. He had his father's resolve and steel and his mother's way to kind of embrace everybody."

Senator Biden has identified the ingredients, if you will, for civic engagement we at the National Urban League have long been familiar with. A passion about equity and civil rights and fair play; the resolve and steel to keep pushing against obstacles, and the equilibrium to embrace everybody has been a hallmark of Urban Leaguers since the organization's founding in 1910.

Significantly, the League was formed by the consolidation of three local New York City community organizations dedicated to helping African-American migrants flooding the city from the rural South adjust to the demands of urban living. Our roots are as a civic organization as well as a civil rights organization.

We've never lost the understanding that these two pursuits, civil rights and the improvement of civic life, go hand in hand. As I said at our recent annual conference in Pittsburgh, none of us can divorce ourselves from the social fabric of this nation. We cannot pretend that we are unaffected by the events, large and small, that swirl around us. The events of the past three years have surely put an exclamation point to that truth.

Thus, we intend to intensify our efforts to inspire African-Americans, and all Americans, to participate more in the civic lives of their neighborhood and their larger communities.

Why? Because America needs more people of whom it will be said, as the *Wilmington News Journal* said of Jim Gilliam, Jr.: "He lived his life well and made... America... a better place for the rest of us to live ours."

## Jackson

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and holding less hope for the future. The 10 states where unions are strongest have higher earnings, better health coverage, less crime, more civic participation, less poverty and better schools than the 10 states where union membership is lowest.

The federal government should be on the side of workers and unions in this battle. But the Bush administration is populated by CEOs and reflects their piratical attitude towards workers. One of Bush's first acts in office was to repeal a Clinton executive order that would have penalized corporations seeking government contracts for repeated violations of labor and environmental laws. The administration has sought to privatize and de-unionize hundreds of thousands of federal jobs. It opposes lifting the minimum wage for poor workers. It pushed to weaken the 40-hour week and deprive millions of workers of overtime pay. Its pension reform bill after the Enron scandals actually would have made it easier for companies to reward lavish pensions to executives, while doing nothing for their workers. When AFL-CIO President John Sweeney calls this the "most anti-worker

administration in memory," he isn't kidding.

Yale prides itself on minting the nation's leaders. Both George Bush and Bill Clinton spent time there. Yet the values that the corporation enforces on its workers are bad for New Haven, Conn., where it is located, and bad for the nation. By example, Yale represents the values of the old Gilded Age, not those that made America a prosperous, middle-class democracy.

So thousands are striking for decent pay and benefits. Their struggle highlights the glaring contrast between the billions in the Yale endowment and the wretched condition to which it condemns many of its service workers. The CEOs of the Yale Corp. and the Bush administration may have little shame about their treatment of the workers, but surely they must have some sense of responsibility about the strength of our democracy and our economy? Will they help expand the middle class or help destroy it? That is now what is being put to the test.

Jesse L. Jackson Sr. is founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow/Push Coalition.

## Curry

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doubtedly be an issue in next year's presidential election. Already, there are signs that his popularity, which was unusually high during the war, is plunging. A recent Time/CNN poll showed that 63 percent of Americans believe going to war was the right policy. Bush's approval rating was 52 percent, about where it was before the war. However, a new poll by Zogby International put his approval rating at 45 percent and 54 percent negative.

Now, the United States must go before the United Nations, the same body that it dismissed as irrelevant at the onset of the war, to beg for help.

"...We cannot let past differences interfere with present duties," Bush said Sunday night. "...Members of the United Nations now have an opportunity and the responsibility, to assume a broader role in assuring that

Iraq becomes a free and democratic nation."

Bush should have done more to enlist international cooperation prior to attacking Iraq. Many allies had wanted to assist in the mission but on a timetable established by the United Nations, not George W. Bush. And even while seeking U.N. help, the United States is still trying to dictate the terms, insisting that a U.N. force be headed by an American.

The tragedy is that this is a war we shouldn't have started. And if the administration had wanted to persist, it should have acted in concert with the United Nations. Now, we're paying the price, financially and in human casualties. We should not be shocked or awed to learn that we will pay an even higher price in the future for this lunacy.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNP News Service.

## Clingman

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Bibleway, Baltimore, and John Mendez, Winston-Salem Ministers' Conference, are absolutely sold on MATAH's One Church-One Channel Program, founded by Father George Clements. They took everyone to church as they emphasized good stewardship via the MATAH Network. Their message, along with Evans' message, should be heard by every minister in the country, especially our Black ministers.

Tom Pope, the powerful, informative, and fearless radio talk show host heard on the Powernomics Radio Network, also lauded MATAH and threw out the caveat that talk is cheap. The real test, Pope shared, is what we do when we leave the conference. Tom had not planned to speak, but we were all very happy he did. Thanks for the booster shot, Tom!

I don't have enough space to tell you everything that took place at the conference, nor do I have the space to cite everyone who participated. Suffice to say that it was certainly inspiring and refreshing to be in the midst of such love, consciousness and understanding of what we must do to take our brothers and sisters to the next level. As I sat and listened, I wondered, as I usually do, why more of our scholar warriors, our entertainers, our business owners, and our national opinion leaders do not speak out in support of such a natural economic strategy, the same strategy every other group uses to get ahead in this country: redirecting a greater portion of our spending toward one another. While I have to assume we are all reading the same

economic book, I guess they're just on a different page—and that's all right. We all need one another.

Finally, there are three more persons I must mention. First, on a sad note, we lost another strong MATAH brother during the conference. Billie Joe Smith, known as the "Big Guy," died in Toledo, Ohio. Like Ken and Brother Sepet, Billie Joe died on his way to freedom. Please pray for his family.

The other person I must note is a man's man, a conscious brother, a humble, charitable, loving, family-oriented Black man with a heart as big as the outdoors. MATAH Chairman Dr. Walter P. Lomax received the Ken Bridges Legacy Lifetime Award for his commitment, support and dedication not only to MATAH but also to his family, his business and to his people. I could write an entire column on this brother, but I will simply say, "Thank you, Dr. Lomax, for your generosity, your grounding and your understanding of 'To whom much is given...' May God continue to bless you and your family."

Last but not least, there is my sister, Jocelyn Bridges. I will not even attempt to describe what I felt when she spoke at the end of the conference. Ken is smiling and Ken's love still flows through you, my sister. Your strength and continued determination to go on are indicative of what the MATAH is all about. You have decided to take it to the next level, and we must do no less. Take it to the next level. Get involved with MATAH!

James E. Clingman, an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American Studies department.