

C O M M E N T A R Y

Media ingoring the White Jayson Blair: Jack Kelley

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Philip Dixon, the chairman of the Journalism Department at Howard University and former managing editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer, and I were having a conversation recently about Jack Kelley, the USA Today's White version of Jayson Blair.



GEORGE CURRY

Do you think they pushed him along too quickly because he was White? Was he a White male old boy network hire? Did his White bosses put him on the fast track because he was White? Did he have a White mentor? And would a Black reporter other than Jayson Blair be kept on staff that long after making so many errors? Does this reflect on all White reporters? Will they be looked at differently now?

Dixon and I laughed as we peppered each other with these and similar questions, largely because they were a variation of the ridiculous ones being asked earlier about Blair, the New York Times' serial liar. Dixon and I agreed that Kelley, who resigned under pressure in January, was worse than Blair because of the steps he took to cover up his plagiarism.

And there was plenty to cover up.

A special team of USA Today reporters, aided by three well respected outside editors, reviewed more than 700 of Kelley's stories written over the past decade. The paper reported on March 19: "... an extensive examination of about 100 of the 720 stories uncovered evidence that found Kelley's journalistic sins were sweeping

and substantial."

The story that almost won a Pulitzer Prize three years ago was about a suicide bombing at a Jerusalem pizza parlor. Kelley filed a story that said, "Three men, who had been eating pizza inside, were catapulted out of the chairs they had been sitting on. When they hit the ground, their heads separated from

their bodies and rolled down the street." He claimed the heads rolled "with their eyes still blinking."

Editors deleted the "eyes still blinking" part of the story. They should have pulled the entire article. By his own account, Kelley was 90 feet away and was thrown to the ground, with his back to the pizzeria. Unless he had eyes in the back of his head, Kelley could not have witnessed what asserted that he had seen.

Kelley also claimed that to have met the bomber just minutes before the explosion. In an interview with CNN, he said, "there was [the] gentleman's head laying on the floor, and I could recognize him as the gentleman who I had saw..."

USA Today reporters investigating Kelley's work learned from Israel's national police that the bomber's head and upper torso hit the ceiling and got stuck in an oven vent during the explosion. Therefore, Kelley could not have possibly seen it on the floor.

His sins didn't stop there.

The team of investigators found, "Kelley wrote scripts to help at least three people (See Curry, Page 12)

Now's time to eradicate minimum sentencing

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I am often asked what is the Black agenda for the 2004 elections and what issues should we be asking the candidates to pay attention to. High on the list is the repeal of Mandatory Minimum Sentences.

I was watching a hearing of the House of Representatives subcommittee on Appropriations on the needs of the Supreme Court. It was chaired by Virginia Rep. Frank Wolf and featured Justices Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas. I was noting that there seemed to be a division of labor between the two justices. Thomas apparently was sent there to testify about the administrative and technological needs of the high court, while Kennedy explained staffing needs and other issues.

Well, they were talking about their respective issues when Wolf asked Kennedy about his pursuit of eliminating mandatory minimums. I was startled at the passion with which Kennedy plowed into the subject, stating that the United States now incarcerates people at eight times more than any industrial country in the world and that 55 percent of those in the federal system are there for petty drug offenses.

Kennedy plowed on, saying that such sentences were "unfair, unjust and unwise..." and that the guidelines were put into place at a time when politicians were trying to outdo one another being "tough on crime." The goal was to give everybody the same sentence since it was thought that



RON WALTERS

no one actually served the sentences meted out by the courts, so long sentences would be a deterrent.

Kennedy also suggested that the sentencing has been too expensive. In California, they were spending \$26,000 on inmates locked up for this purpose and spending just \$6,000 on education per child at the

level of elementary education.

Wolf struck back saying that we are becoming a violent society and that he would be for possibly adjusting the sentences for nonviolent offenders, but not for violent ones. For example, he talked about taking the money used to incarcerate offenders and putting it into drug rehabilitation programs and if people violated their drug rehabilitation program, then they would do time - or some other such formulation.

Kennedy shot back with the thought that supervised release has been found to be 40 percent more effective and cheaper than having someone in full-time custody and that since the court system has to spend more money to allocate resources for mandatory minimums, we are not doing a good job. Kennedy ended his passionate charge to the conservative lawmakers in front of him by praising the courage of justices who served lower level courts that were not following the minimum guidelines.

Today, there is a group called Families Against Mandatory Minimum Sentences that has grown up to confront and repeal (See Walters, Page 12)

Urban League in San Diego: Profile in great leadership

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I recently addressed the Young Professionals, a component of the San Diego Urban League. The Young Professionals are serious about developing leaders - "authentic" leaders, and they demonstrated it in their conference. Although we graduate "leaders" every month or so, I always ask, "With all of our Black leaders, why aren't we going forward?" The true test of leaders is the direction of their leadership and their ability to take us where we need to go. In addition, authentic leaders not only have the character, integrity, determination, and passion, to lead, they also have the willingness to make the sacrifices associated with authentic leadership.

Those issues served as the basis for my speech, and I was so delighted that the planners of the event added the word "authentic" to my topic. We must seek authentic leadership; we must demand that our leaders be authentic and do the things that are commensurate with such a high calling. For instance, many of our leaders are simply making feeble attempts to "get along" with everyone and not make waves when it comes to standing up and speaking up for Black people. They are simply doing and saying things that make some of us feel good in our misery. They are afraid,

in many cases, to do anything that will be perceived by the Establishment as pro-Black, which makes it shameful for them to be classified as leaders, and even more shameful for us to follow them.

I don't want to use this entire column to re-discuss my San Diego speech, so I will summarize it. Authentic leadership is very much needed among Black folks today. How do we identify it? By paying close attention to the direction in which you are being led and by assessing the results of the leadership.

What have you gained as a result of such leadership? As some politician once said, "Are you better off now than you were before?" Authentic leaders take you to a higher place and leave you and their surroundings better off as a result of their leadership.

I am often reminded of Brother Carter G. Woodson's writings about leadership, but in my speech I cited others such as Myles Munroe, Warren Bennis, and John Gardner, who said in his book, On Leadership, "Citizens must know the possibilities and limitations of leadership. We must strengthen and support good leaders and be able to see through the leaders who are exploiting us. If we are lazy, apathetic, and self-indulgent, and willingly follow corrupt leaders, we will certainly get the leadership we deserve." Look

for and support the "authentic" leaders in your communities.

Now, let's get back to the Young Professionals Leadership Development Summit. I met fantastic brothers and sisters who shared their knowledge with us. I heard uplifting and joyous poetry, in an African historical context, and beautiful acappella music from Sister Starla and her talented daughters, Ishe and Sherehe. We heard the inspiring and tantalizing words of Maria Dowd, who has a new book, "Journey to Empowerment," scheduled to be released in August 2004, and I met Lana Reid, my newfound "homegirl" from Winston-Salem, N.C., who has a new book titled, "My Love Notes to a Black Man."

There was another young lady there, too, a veritable whirlwind, a refreshing young voice of common sense, an accomplished singer, songwriter, actress, and inspirational public speaker. She is Cee Cee Michaela. You may have seen her as Yvonne on the television show, Girlfriends, or you may have seen her in your local church, bringing down the house in her own soothing kind of way. If you have not seen or heard this young lady yet, don't worry about it; you will. Playing a role in the new movie, Beauty Shop, and touring the country singing and speaking, Cee Cee is surely coming to your neck of the

woods real soon. Her book is titled, "If I Had Known," and her CD is titled, "Everybody's Talking."

I listened to three outstanding speakers during the seminar session of the conference. Brother Stephen Murphy, president and CEO of Murphy Performance Strategies, a consulting firm specializing in individual and organizational performance management, wowed the participants with his buoyant personality and insightful presentation on "The Dynamics of Building and Influencing Relationships." Then there was Pastor C. Dennis Williams, whom I called Paul Robeson because of his beautiful baritone voice. Not only did he have a great voice, he had something to say with that voice, and he did it quite well. And there was Sister Ann Phillips, the gifted facilitator and consultant from the Ken Blanchard Companies. She continued the trend of excellence with her presentation on Personal Action Strategy for Success.

The Young Professionals displayed "authentic" leadership by presenting this event, and San Diego should be very proud of them. Next year there should be standing room only; maybe I can come back, too.

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