

Clinton artist hopes to inspire other Blacks

By Shenise L. Kelly
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Simmie Knox, the first African-American to paint an official presidential portrait, a rendering of former President Bill Clinton, says he hopes his pioneering role will inspire other African-Americans.

"I feel good because not only did it happen, but also it happened to me, and I hope it sends a signal to our community that it can happen to someone else," says Knox, a seasoned Washington D.C. artist. "There are not as many of us as I would like to see out there doing this."

The official portrait of Clinton was unveiled recently at a ceremony in the White House East Room as the president and First Lady officiated.

Knox was selected by former President Clinton to complete his official portrait.

"I was selected because obviously he liked my work,

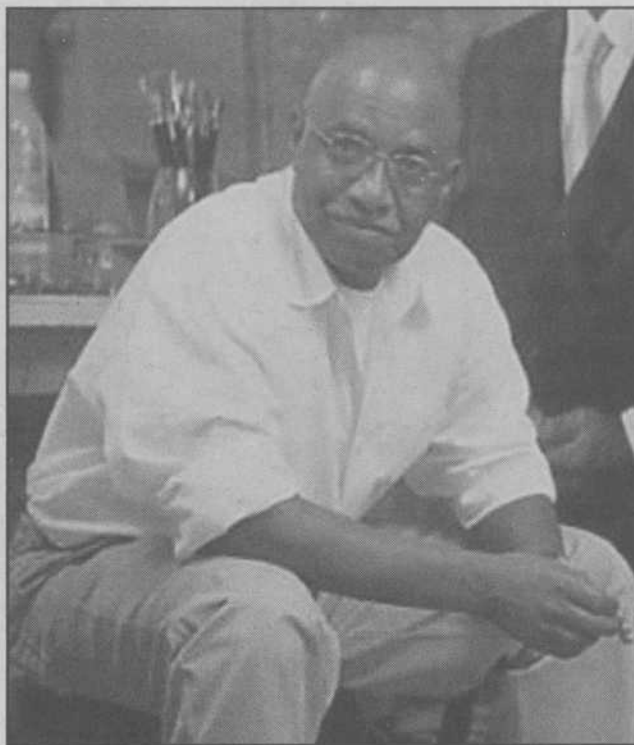
and was pleased with it and thought I could do the job," Knox says. "I enjoy what I do so I never go to work a day in my life."

At the unveiling, President Bush thanked Knox "for putting his skilled hand to the portraits."

After seeing the progress Knox was making with her husband's portrait, former First Lady, New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton asked Knox to paint her official portrait also.

This is Knox's first presidential portrait, but by no means his first celebrity. His official portrait paintings include Frederick Douglass, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Hank Aaron, Bill Cosby, Muhammad Ali, and Howard University President H. Patrick Swygert.

An Alabama native and graduate of Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia, Knox was named to complete the official



Simmie Knox, the first African-American to paint an official presidential portrait, wants to open doors for Black artists.

portrait of former President Clinton while completing the official portrait of Swygert for the University of Albany, where he served as president before taking over

at Howard.

Because of the hectic schedule of people he usually paints, Knox works off and on with the portraits, meeting with former Presi-

dent Clinton five times and his wife, three.

"It took about a year each before we could get them completed. They all have busy schedules and sometimes it's kind of difficult to coordinate schedules, but we managed to work through," Knox, says.

When completing portraits, some artists use distinct methods to capture their subjects' personality.

"A good part of the time, I spent sitting with him was really just in conversation. I think it is a part of his technique to try to figure out who the subject might be through conversation, indicating what is important to them by way of conversation," says Swygert. "He is very, very skilled about this thing. He is a talented artist."

Knox, 68, has specialized in oil portraits for more than two decades. Prior to that, he taught art and worked as an abstract artist. He converted to portraits because

he felt that there was nothing more challenging and interesting to paint than a human face.

Sheila Bussey, an art teacher a predominately Black Lithonia High School in Lithonia, Ga., just outside Atlanta, has studied Knox's work.

"Mr. Knox's paintings are captivating in that they invite the viewer to linger and take a closer look at the subject," she observes. "Through his dynamic skill he is able to make a memorable connection between the portrait and the story."

Since the unveiling of the Clinton portraits, Knox has received a great deal of attention — from Atlanta and beyond. His fee starts at \$9,500 for a 16x20 head-to-shoulder and he has already been contracted to paint a portrait of historian John Hope Franklin and his wife for Fisk University in Nashville. He says, "I am kind of busy right now. I am booked for six months."

Whitney CDs flood school district

SEATTLE (AP) - The Puget Sound Educational Service District, serving 35 school districts, received 1,300 copies of Whitney Houston's soaring rendition of the "Star-Spangled Banner," a disc that includes only one other song, "America the Beautiful."

The Washington state school and library system received the CDs and hundreds of others from the recording industry as part of a price-fixing lawsuit.

Other discs have raunchy rap unsuitable for school libraries, and some librarians said it looked like the music companies were dumping stale inventory.

"Really, you can never have too many Whitney Houston CDs," joked district spokeswoman Karen Farley.

Forty-three states are part of the settlement and Washington is the first state to receive the CDs - more than 115,000 for libraries, colleges and schools. Millions more will land on library loading docks around the country in coming weeks.

In the lawsuit, music distributors and recording companies were accused of penalizing retailers by withholding advertising reimbursement if the retailers cut prices. The industry agreed to pay \$67 million to consumers, and mailed out

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—Karen Farley
District spokeswoman

checks in the amount of \$13.86 a few months ago.

The CD giveaway to schools, colleges and libraries will cost an estimated \$76 million.

The Spokane-based educational service district is about halfway through its 5,900 CDs, which seem to lean heavily to classical music, including multiple copies of Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro."

"It seems like a very diverse selection," said spokesman Steve Witter. "I suppose if you want them to appreciate the '60s — we have everything from Mel Torme to the Jefferson Airplane."

The CDs were selected by experts and educators for their lasting significance, and attorneys general for the states involved signed off on the list, said Gary Larson, a spokesman for Washington Attorney General Christine Gregoire.

"We did not just give carte blanche to the recording industry to provide any CDs

they had left over in their warehouse," Larson said. To qualify, CDs had to have been on industry charts for 26 weeks or to have peaked in the top half of the charts.

Librarian Lara Weigand from the Tacoma Public Library is dubious that even half of the 1,325 CDs sent to her 10-library system meet that criteria: She said she doesn't need 57 copies of "Three Mo Tenors," based on a 2001 PBS special about African-American tenors.

"It was well-received, but if you were making core lists of everything a library should have, the CDs shipped would generally not be on them," Weigand said.

Gregoire's office is advising recipients to swap their duplicates with other recipients — an e-mail list is being set up to help out — and sell the discs they don't want.

The office also is checking on the complaints to see if the settlement was violated, and has notified the claims administrator in hopes of averting similar problems in other states, Larson said.

"We were trying to do some good for schools and libraries across the state," he said. "We may not have been quite as successful as we'd hoped but we have ample evidence that many ... are happy with what they've received."

Sharpton to host 'I Hate My Job'

NEW YORK (AP) - Al Sharpton, who failed in his last bid for a new job — president of the United States — now has a job on a reality TV show that guides people on career makeovers. Spike TV, the Viacom cable channel that targets a young male audience, said Sharpton will host "I Hate My Job," premiering in the fall.

"I like the concept of trying to have people discover their purpose in life, and not have the world define them or settle for less than who they want to be just to pay their bills," Sharpton said Tuesday.

The eight male contestants in the show will quit their jobs and work with two "life counselors," Sharpton and California psychologist Stephanie Raye, who will give them advice and weekly assignments. A panel will decide which contestants will continue each week.

"Reverend Sharpton came from a modest upbringing and became a major political force and presidential candidate," said Kevin Kay, Spike's executive vice president for

programming.

"He's lived the American dream so he's the perfect person for our eight contestants to learn from."

"I'm the working man's (Donald) Trump," Sharpton said. "He brings people into the penthouse. We bring them into the house."

Since his campaign ended, Sharpton has been aggressively seeking out media jobs and has signed a deal with CNBC as a commentator, and possibly develop a talk show.

An ordained Pentecostal minister, Sharpton isn't abandoning politics, however, and scoffed at the idea that being the featured player in a reality show is somewhat undignified for a once and perhaps future candidate.

His campaign for president attracted more attention after he was host of "Saturday Night."

"A lot of politicians don't do it because they can't do it," he said. "I can do it."

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