

Youth needed to fill voids in leadership

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — As civil rights groups look to replace retiring leaders or begin making succession plans for those that have served in leadership positions for more than three decades, young people should be among the primary candidates to replace aging activists, many movement observers say.

"Dr. King was 26 years old when he led the Montgomery bus boycott. Young Black leadership is now standing around. We need them to be more aggressive, more radical, more progressive," says Rev. Timothy McDonald, president of the People for the American Way's National African-American Ministers Leadership Council. "Students have always led.... There's plenty that they can fight for, particularly with this administration. There are enough issues."

Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree agrees.

"I challenge the 30-somethings to step up. Fannie Lou Hammer, Medgar Evers, Dorothy Height stepped up in their 30s." Ogletree says, referring to noted civil rights activists.

Black America is witnessing a vacuum in its leadership.

Mary Frances Berry, chairwoman of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, has stepped down from her post after a quarter of a century on the non-partisan body, the last 11 as chair. The NAACP's board of directors, consisting of many elderly members, is now searching for a new president and CEO

after the resignation of Kweisi Mfume. Jesse Jackson Sr., active since the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March, was chosen by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1966 to head the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's (SCLC) economics-oriented Operation Breadbasket.

SCLC, Dr. King's old organization, now headed by Charles Steele Jr., a former Alabama state senator, is struggling to become viable. Dorothy Height, former president of the National Council on Negro Women, is now 92.

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) helped organize the Freedom Riders throughout the South but is now only a shell of an organization. National Urban League President and CEO Marc Morial has been in his new job for only 18 months.

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.), former chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) under Jimmy Carter, says new leadership might come from non-traditional sources.

"We should not stereotype leadership and where it's going to come from," she explains. "That's because leadership is transferable. Kweisi Mfume was in Congress, and he became head of the NAACP. Mary Frances Berry was chair of the civil rights commission and now she [will continue as] a university professor."

A change in personnel should be accompanied by a change in attitudes, says Clayborne Carson, professor of history at Stanford University and editor of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. pa-

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— Rev. Joseph Lowery

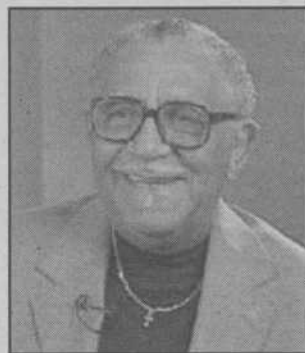
pers.

"For a long time, what we needed in those positions was defensive leadership. How do we defend those gains made during the 60s? This is not the dynamic leadership that you look for going into the future," Carson says.

He predicts that much of the new Black leadership will likely come from political circles, such as mayors and members of Congress. Because of their backgrounds, Carson says, they can be skillful in helping enact laws to protect the rights of the oppressed.

But, that won't be easy. All branches of the federal government are controlled by Republicans. Only 43 of 435 members the House of Representatives are Black. On the Senate side, there is only one African-American among 100 senators. Consequently, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to pass more laws governing the criminal justice system, predatory lending, the death penalty and racial profiling.

The number of Black elected officials across the country increased from approximately 300 in 1965 to 9,101 in 2001, according to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Still, that's only 1.8 percent of all



elected officials in the U. S. Moreover, political experts say Blacks represent most Black majority districts, and future advances will depend on their ability to represent districts that are predominantly White.

"I expect that what we're going to see in the next very few years is African-American men and women who are going to be competing for gubernatorial positions, House and Senate positions in record numbers," Ogletree predicts. "They are training and ready to step into the shoes."

Ogletree points to Deval Patrick, 48, former head of the Justice Department's civil rights division under President Clinton as an example.

Patrick has announced that he might run for governor of Massachusetts.

Former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder, now mayor of Richmond, Va., is the only African-American elected governor. Currently, Barack Obama of Illinois is only the third Black U. S. senator since the 1800s.

However, the presence of Black elected officials has not always guaranteed racial progress. Virginia's Wilder showed racial sensitivity in removing divisive symbols of the old Confederacy that were offensive to Blacks.

Yet, he did not seek to eliminate the death penalty, though Blacks are over represented on death row. And some critics argue, there was no significant drop in poverty during Wilder's administration.

Many young people feel that they can make a difference. Brandon T. Neal, 26, director of the NAACP Youth and College Division, is one of them.

"Young leadership is stepping forth, but we need a venue," Neal says. "Jim Crow was more tangible. You had

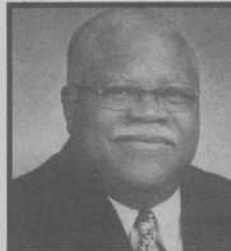
to sit in the back of the bus or drink from the separate water fountain. But those same types of racisms and injustices are coached within our society today, for example, in our criminal justice system. They're just more hidden and more subtle."

The reason racism is more subtle now is because the Civil Rights Movement removed many of the barriers of inequality. Blacks are no longer forced to drink from separate water fountains, use separate toilets, ride in the back of the bus or live on one side of the train tracks.

Rev. Joseph Lowery, co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., led many campaigns to remove those barriers. And he is ready for some younger leaders to follow in his footsteps.

"I am not speaking of the one leader scenario," he says. "We need leaders in all fields to coalesce around a progressive agenda that stands for genuine family values, that holds all life to be sacred, and stands for equity [and] fairness in public policy."

Social Security Reform: Don't Forget the Unfair Rules Hurting Hundreds of Thousands of Educators



By
Reg Weaver,
President,
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Association

Amid the Social Security reform talk of impending shortfalls, investment yields and transitional costs, it's easy to forget that retirement policy affects real people. For example, it has seriously affected Janice Quas, a woman who went to her high school prom in the late 1960s while her boyfriend went to Vietnam.

"But it's okay, because he came back alive," she says of the man who became her husband and father of their three children. After working as a stay-at-home mother, the two of them both decided to go back to school, and Janice became a teacher at age 38. She still teaches second grade today in Illinois.

Her husband recently passed away, leaving Janice heartbroken to lose her high school sweetheart. Her voice gets hard when she talks about the unfair discovery she made after his death.

"I found out that since I became a teacher, and pay into the state retirement system as a public employee, I am no longer entitled to all of my husband's Social Security benefits."

What Quas is experiencing as a widow and teacher is felt by millions of public employees all over the country.

The reason: arcane provisions in the Social Security law titled the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Program (WEP). These laws were originally put in place to keep high-paid public officials and their spouses from "double dipping" by receiving the full benefits of both the national Social Security and state-backed pension programs that cover public employees in about half of the states. In practice, however, they have had the effect of denying lower-paid public servants the benefits they or their spouses have earned. For example, mid-career professionals moving from the private sector are dismayed to learn that becoming a teacher will mean the loss of Social Security they earned in their previous career.

As the President of the nation's largest teachers union, the National Education Association, I join Quas and millions of others who've dedicated their lives to working with children in asking the Administration and members of Congress to change the law so America's educators can receive the Social Security benefits that they deserve. Even before we consider any major overhaul of the Social Security system, simple fairness dictates that we fix this anomaly that punishes people for choosing careers in public service.

It's easy to forget that policy affects real people.



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Cosby's lawyer asks why accuser waited so long

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The attorney hired to defend comedian Bill Cosby from allegations he fondled a female acquaintance questioned Friday why the woman took a year to come forward.

The woman was formerly an employee at Temple University, Cosby's beloved alma mater. She told police this month in her native Canada that Cosby fondled her at his suburban Philadelphia mansion in January 2004. "It's pointedly bizarre because it's been a year since it allegedly happened, and she is coming forward," said Cosby's attorney, Walter M. Phillips Jr. "It will be vigorously defended."

He said he expected investigators would need some time before deciding whether to file charges and that he did not think au-

thorities in Pennsylvania had interviewed the accuser yet.

Durham Area Regional Police in Ontario had referred the case to police in Cheltenham Township, the Philadelphia suburb where Cosby has a home. Neither Cheltenham Police Chief John Norris nor prosecutors in Montgomery County returned repeated messages left Friday.

The woman, now in her mid-30s, left Temple in April and returned to Canada. She previously played basketball at the University of Arizona.

Cosby, 67, best-known as a warm, wise-cracking TV dad, has provoked debate this past year with blunt remarks on personal responsibility aimed at the Black community.