

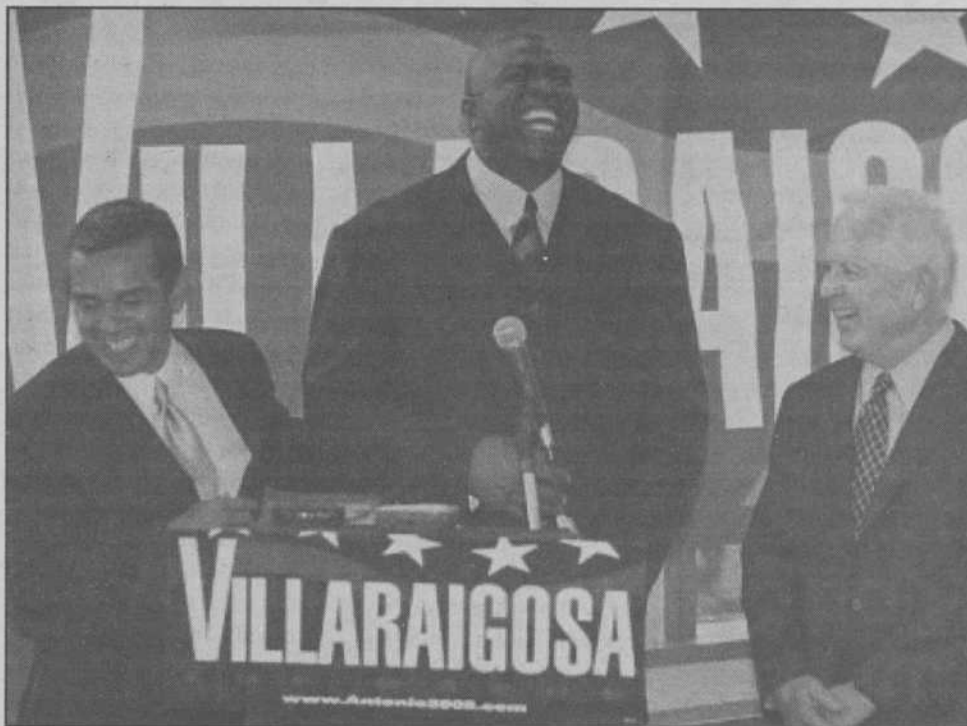
Magic supports Villaraigosa in LA mayor's race

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Antonio Villaraigosa's story would be compelling in any language. The son of a Mexican immigrant, raised by a single mother, Villaraigosa dropped out of high school yet rose to become speaker of the California Assembly, an adviser to John Kerry's presidential campaign and, now, the front-running candidate for mayor of Los Angeles.

A Villaraigosa victory would mark another milestone for Hispanics, whose political influence has been expanding from California to the White House. But to unseat Mayor James Hahn, a fellow Democrat, Villaraigosa must capture a significant number of Black votes in the nation's second-largest city.

With the May 17 election less than six weeks away, the race is challenging assumptions that Blacks are reluctant to support Hispanic candidates because of lingering tensions over who gets the spoils of political power.

Blacks were a key factor in Hahn's 2001 runoff victory over Villaraigosa, with eight in 10 Black votes going to Hahn. But if Hahn, who is White, inherited the Black vote from his father - a long-serving county supervisor lionized in Black South Los Angeles - the days of



Los Angeles mayoral candidate Antonio Villaraigosa, left, receives the endorsement of former NBA star and CEO of Magic Johnson Enterprises Earvin "Magic" Johnson, center, and former Los Angeles Mayor Richard J. Riordan, right, on Monday at a news conference, in Sherman Oaks, Calif. Villaraigosa has been working hard to woo Black constituents.

political hand-me-downs appear to be over.

This time around, a string of marquee Black endorsements for Villaraigosa coupled with the mayor's lukewarm Black support in the March 8 primary suggest a new playing field.

"It's the politics of subtraction. (Villaraigosa) has to subtract a large element from the mayor's base - African-Americans," said John Pitney, a political scientist at nearby Claremont McKenna College. "That will be a gi-

ant step toward winning."

It's not just Blacks. The liberal Villaraigosa, a former labor activist and one-time head of the local American Civil Liberties Union, must court other political communities that have looked at him with distrust, including moderates and Republicans.

But unlike 2001, Villaraigosa, 52, has lined up prominent Black endorsements from Rep. Maxine Waters, a Democratic icon who supported Hahn four years ago, and city Councilman Bernard Parks, whose ouster as police chief in 2002 damaged Hahn's standing in the Black community.

For Black voters, the issue is not skin color or family legacy but "what are you doing for the community?" said Franklin D. Gilliam Jr., a political scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, who studies racial politics.

"In the primary, roughly half of Black voters voted for a non-Black (Villaraigosa), even with a Black in the race," Gilliam said, referring to Parks, who finished fourth and didn't qualify for the May 17 runoff. "It's a bit of a dramatization to say Blacks just won't vote for Latino candidates."

Regina Robertson, 37, a

Black school worker who voted for Hahn four years ago, said she is leaning toward Villaraigosa because of frustration over dead-end schools and gang violence.

"We are losing our kids. They are crying out for help," Robertson said.

Despite Los Angeles' large and growing Hispanic population - 46.5 percent, according to the 2000 census - the city hasn't had a Hispanic mayor since 1872.

The mayoralty "is part of the jewels of the crown as far as political integration into California," said Harry Pachon, director of the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute at the University of Southern California.

Pachon, noting that Hispanic and Black political leaders have worked together for years in California, said Black-Hispanic friction tends to play out at the "street level" over jobs and in prisons.

In Los Angeles, Hispanics have gradually filled many of hotel jobs that once went to Blacks. In addition, Hispanics have been moving into historically Black areas of South Los Angeles.

In interviews, Black voters acknowledged some friction - but said that's changing.

"We can't run L.A. without the Hispanics," said 63-year-old real estate salesman Alex Greene. "I don't have the fear of the Hispanic takeover."

Still, in a diverse city, Villaraigosa's ethnicity demands a political balancing act.

He does not want to turn his back on his Hispanic roots nor be defined by them - a candidate who happens to be Hispanic, not the Hispanic candidate. On the campaign trail, he moves easily between English and Spanish.

Some analysts say Villaraigosa's ethnicity became a fatal flaw in 2001, when Hahn's campaign pummeled him for seeking the pardon of a convicted drug trafficker, a move that linked drugs and race.

While the city's Hispanic population has been growing, the Black population has dipped to about 11 percent. Still, Blacks made up 16 percent of the turnout in the March primary, with Hispanics at 22 percent, according to a Los Angeles Times exit poll.

Hahn, 54, has been highlighting the city's lower crime rate and job growth while depicting Villaraigosa as a vacillating leader. Other election factors could include the Hispanic turnout and an ongoing corruption probe at City Hall.

And, of course, Blacks dissatisfied with Hahn could simply stay home on election day.

"There's enough residual stuff there that it's not a slam dunk (for Villaraigosa)," Gilliam said.

Federal civil rights lawyer unlicensed

By Makebra M. Anderson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - A second attorney working on one of largest civil rights cases in history is being investigated by the Department of Justice for practicing law without a license. Michael Sitcov, the lead attorney in the controversial Pigford v. Veneman case, was unlicensed for two years, while making decisions on the fate of thousands of Black farmers.

"I think this is on purpose because this is the largest civil rights case in history for Black people," said John Boyd, president of the National Black Farmers Association.

"Michael Sitcov was an attorney for the Department of Justice, so this is not some flunky. He made mostly all the decisions on the case; therefore, DOJ should be re-looking at all of these cases. Undoubtedly, that's the least they can do on this issue."

Sitcov stopped paying his bar dues in October 2002 after paying them consistently for more than 20 years. After numerous reminders, the District of Columbia Bar suspended his license between October 1, 2002 and November 7, 2004. During his suspension, Sitcov continued to work on the case for DOJ, although it's illegal to practice law without a license.

He is the second DOJ attorney accused of malpractice. In December, Margaret O'Shea, who represented Black farmers as a lawyer for DOJ, misrepresented herself as an attorney. O'Shea was hired by a Public Defender's office in California. However, a co-worker tried to research her legal background and discovered that she was not listed as a licensed attorney. For some, this is particularly deplorable because of

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Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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