

# Michael Jackson, U.S. media and lost heroes

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Michael Jackson's child molestation trial is now over and this is as good a time as any to ask: Why do we expend so much time and emotional capital on the trials and tribulations of entertainers and athletes? Instead of seeing them performing on stage or the bas-



GEORGE CURRY

ketball court, we're now just as likely to see them in court or on "Court TV." The list includes Mike Tyson, O.J. Simpson, Little Kim, Koby Bryant, Mystikal, ad infinitum.

With all the talk of personal responsibility, it's time to exercise some collective responsibility. In doing so, we must stop letting others select our role models. Our most trusted role models should not be entertainers and athletes. Michael Jackson is not a role model. Regardless of the verdict in his trial, Michael Jackson is not someone you would want to see baby-sit your relative, especially a young male relative. Some observers said the 3-month trial, covered by more than 2,000 journalists from around the world, was essentially a contest to determine who was the weirdest: Jackson or the mother of the 13-year-old cancer patient?

When he comes down from his tree house, Michael, at the age of 46, sees nothing wrong with sleeping in a bed with young boys. No matter how you slice it, that's sick. The tabloids shouldn't call him Whacko Jacko, they should refer to him as Sicko Jacko. Yet, too many of us are quick to excuse his behavior, claiming he's being picked on because of his race. That's ridiculous. What race?

As Attorney Thomas N. Todd, a long-time civil rights activist in Chicago likes to say, Michael says it doesn't matter whether you're Black or White. But it's clear from his appearance, that Michael is not taking any chances.

Have you seen the latest videotapes of Michael Jackson? I am not sure if anyone in the Addams Family would want to share a bed with him. He has a Scary Curl, a butchered nose (Do you remember when little Michael had a Black nose?) and his skin looks like it has been covered with a pail of liquid white-out. And he sings about the man in the mirror. What man? I know, I know. Some of you think I am picking on Michael. No, he chose to be the King of Weirdness. These are self-inflicted

wounds. Sure, he is entitled to be as weird as he'd like. But stop propping Michael and these other misfits up as heroes.

Last week, I gave a Juneteenth speech in Corpus Christi, Texas. The 10-day ceremony, headed by Gloria Scott and sponsored by the local Black Chamber of Commerce, honored

the academic achievements of middle- and high school students. In talking with the students, it became clear that they had been inspired not by the likes of Michael Jackson and O.J. Simpson, but ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

When I think back to my own childhood in Tuscaloosa, Ala., those who inspired me most were my family; Mr. Robert L. Glynn, the head of my housing project; McDonald Hughes, my no-nonsense high school principal; Mrs. Hazel Hackett, my high school guidance counselor; Mr. Edward Jenkins, my scoutmaster; Mr. Robert Wade, a neighbor who helped guide young people — especially the males; Mr. Luke Richardson; Coaches Henry Holbert, Lou Mims, Hugh and Thomas Martin; Mr. Willie; and a bunch of women who smothered us with unconditional love and confidence — Miss Dot, Miss Betty, Ma Sis, Mrs. McCane, Miss Myrtle Lee, Miss Bessie, Mrs. Henderson, Mrs. Hazel, Miss Edna, Mrs. Lottie, Miss Bernice, Mrs. Lula Mae, Mrs. Mary Elizabeth, Miss "Sick" Mary, Mrs. Temple, Miss Laura and too many others to name.

Reflecting on our childhood memories should remind us of the impact we can have on young people, just as our elders had on us.

It doesn't have to be anything large. Sometimes it can be a kind word or expressing confidence in a kid. You never know until years later, if then, how much impact you've had on a person's life.

So, whenever a Michael Jackson or O.J. Simpson falls from grace, don't think about it as tarnishing the image of a Black hero. The real heroes and she-heroes are not athletes and entertainers. They were, and are, the everyday people who take time out of their lives to inspire and encourage those in need of hope. The next time someone tries to depict an athlete or entertainer as a role model, tell them to "Beat It."

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# Juneteenth is Blacks' day of independence

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

June 19, 1865, is commemorated by Africans in America as the day the last slaves were freed. For many Black folks, Juneteenth, as it is now called, is our Independence Day — that final nail in the coffin of the worst treatment ever put on a people. Juneteenth was



JAMES CLINGMAN

the culmination of the prayers, hopes, and dreams of our enslaved relatives, the notice that finally they had their freedom, despite recalcitrant cotton plantation owners who were not about to allow our ancestors go in peace. Freedom was in the air on that day in June 1865, and millions of Black people still celebrate that freedom today.

This year, I am speaking in Columbus, Ohio, at their Juneteenth celebration, and I am pleased and honored to do so. It is my hope that the brothers and sisters will come out and participate in this event in even higher numbers than they would if it were a concert or a football game. Yes, there is an admission, but there are also admission fees for amusement parks, theaters, music festivals, sporting events, etc. At those events you get entertained; at the Juneteenth event in Columbus, you will get educated, informed, inspired, and, I hope, infected with a consciousness that will cause you to always support your brothers and sisters in efforts such as this one.

Juneteenth is about freedom. I ask again: "Are we really free?" Many of those ancestors in Texas, upon hearing the good news, left with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They left to "seek for themselves," as Richard Allen stated 100 years earlier. They took the risk of being killed or even enslaved again, despite so-called emancipation. They were willing to go out into a land about which they had no knowledge and get something for themselves. They were not about to continue to "work for their former masters for wages"; they knew full well what that would mean.

The trick of emancipation has pervasively perpetuated itself in this country, especially in our children's textbooks, thus, it is incumbent upon us to learn as much as we can about what really happened and what the Emancipation Proclamation was all about. It is also important for us to know the words of General Orders No. 3, read by Major General Gordon Granger on that day in June 1865. Many of us celebrate

Juneteenth but have no idea of the details of the celebration. (I first learned about it in 1985.)

We should know and teach our children that the Emancipation Proclamation did not free the slaves; approximately 800,000 slaves were not covered by the proclamation, and the rest were in states that had

seceded from the Union, so those states simply ignored Abe Lincoln's order. The power of words is important; however, and even though the 13th Amendment was not ratified until December 1865, the brothers and sisters in Galveston heard loud and clear the words, "all slaves are free," and they took it from there.

One hundred and forty years later, we should ask ourselves, "What are we celebrating? Our ancestors celebrated physical freedom. Shouldn't our celebration be about psychological freedom by now? Our brothers and sisters celebrated the right to leave and explore new lands and new opportunities. Is it not our obligation to celebrate ownership of income-producing assets and having realized the opportunities our parents and grandparents passed on to us?"

They celebrated life in its simplest form when their chains were broken. With all of our excess, are we celebrating their lives, their sacrifices, their pain and suffering on our behalf?

My call to you this year is as it has been for many years now. Celebrate the freedom of our ancestors with the understanding that they wanted us to be free as well. Have we done our jobs the way they did theirs?

Are we free if we continue to allow crooked, greedy politicians to use us as political pawns? Are we free if we continue to settle for the economic crumbs from the master's table in the form of parties, football games, concerts, and dysfunctional programs that only demonstrate and perpetuate our dysfunction?

Are we free if we continue to allow our brothers and sisters to be beat down, shot down, and abused by racist police officers? Are we free if we continue to allow our children to be shot down by their peers, as we impotently look on and do nothing but complain about it? Are we free if we allow drugs and guns free access into our neighborhoods?

(See Clingman, Page 12)

## LaGrande

(Continued from Page 10)

they refused to give us our "40 acres and a mule," and continue to refuse to pay reparations, but now, collectively, they don't want to offer even a simple apology — and we not only lost liberty and property, but thousands into the tens of thousands of African-Americans lost their very lives.

American history includes times when it failed miserably to protect individual freedoms and rights, but, more than any other group, this country has failed African-Americans.

There were over 700,000 African slaves (survivors after scores of thousands more died in transit during the Middle Passage), and this period in American history left as its legacy some of the most unbearable scars on African-Americans as a people.

The sponsors of the resolution, Sen. George Allen (R-Va.) and Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), "the apology is long overdue." Senator Landrieu was motivated to propose the bill after seeing the book "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America" a collection of postcards taken at

lynching scenes. Senator Allen's motives might not be as conscionable; he could be using this resolution to mend his rift with Black Virginians who criticized him for hanging a noose outside his law office, displaying a Confederate flag in his home and proclaiming a Confederate History Month while governor from 1994 until 1998 (KKK-like behavior in a two piece suit).

Whatever the motivation, this "apology" is a very small step in trying to right the wrong of a people who were ripped from their country only to be brought to a land to be totally

degraded, and humiliated, and thrown into cultural upheaval.

The next step will be to apologize for slavery, which the Senate has never gone on the record condemning it. The U.S. government needs to apologize for the whole system of slavery, the whole wrongness of it, and lynching was just a part of it.

And as for our politically astute brothers and sisters, a warning if you are not careful and keep electing closet Klansmen. And find out how Senators Reid and Ensign voted on this measure, or if they were even present.