

Mexican stamps decried as racist

Civil rights leaders denounce Jim Crow-era characters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Three African-American activists upset about the Mexican government's issuance of a postage stamp they consider racist were arrested Tuesday while blocking the sidewalk in front of the Mexican Consulate.

The men were among a half-dozen Black leaders protesting Mexican President Vicente Fox's refusal to recall the stamp.

It honors cartoonist Sixto Valencia Burgos, whose most famous character is, Memín Pinguín.

"We find it incredible that the president of Mexico doesn't get it. Anytime Blacks are disrespected with racism — I don't care if it's in Mexico or South Africa — we have a right to organize against it," said Najee Ali, the director of Project Islamic Hope and one of the three who was arrested, cited and released.

Part of a growing chorus of civil-rights leaders condemning the stamp, Ali also called on Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to denounce the stamp, saying it was urgent at a time when racial tensions are running high among Black and Latino students.

At an unrelated press conference, Villaraigosa called



Los Angeles Police officers arrest Black civil rights activist Najee Ali for allegedly refusing to disperse Tuesday outside the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles, while protesting Mexico's sale of postage stamps featuring a Black comic book figure that some civil rights groups consider racist. Black leaders have requested that the stamps be discontinued.

the stamps derogatory, but did not indicate whether he would write a formal letter to the Mexican government.

"Anytime we have a caricature of any ethnic minority, in any way, it's wrong," he said.

Mexican postal officials said its new five-stamp series featuring the 1940s-era comic book character Memín Pinguín was chosen for a series of new stamps in the country because he is a beloved icon in Mexican history.

But the character's Jim Crow-era look — complete with exaggerated eyes and lips — has infuriated Black and Hispanic civil rights leaders who say the stamps perpetuate one of the worst racial stereotypes.

"It is offensive," Rev. Jesse L. Jackson of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition told the Washington Post. He and other leaders are urging Mexican President Vicente Fox to apologize and stop circulation of the stamps. Jackson said he would lead a

demonstration at Mexican consulates if Fox does not do so.

Less than two months ago, Jackson called on Fox to apologize for saying that Mexican migrants in the United States work jobs that "even Blacks don't want," a comment he said was taken out of context.

Marc H. Morial, executive director of the National Urban League, is pushing for President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to speak out against the stamps.

"It's outrageous, it's offensive, and it really raises the question of whether President Fox's apology was sincere and meaningful," Morial told the paper.

Janet Murguía, president of the National Council of La Raza, said it is "impossible to overstate how appalled and offended I am, not only by the stamp but by the reaction of the Mexican postal service."

She added: "Hispanic Americans and all other Americans will and should be equally outraged."

According to David Pilgrim, curator of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Mich., stereotypical images of Blacks such as that of Memín Pinguín are prolific in Mexico, Latin America and Japan.

"I'm disappointed but not shocked," he told the paper. "This is consistent with what we in the United States would refer to as a pickaninny image. It's disappointing when you find a government putting its stamp on racism."

ther investigate Perez.

The court did not immediately make the mistrial ruling public.

A written ruling will be issued Thursday, the judge's clerk said in confirming the mistrial.

Perez and Knight have never been arrested or charged in connection with the slaying and were not named in the family's suit. Mack, now serving a prison term for bank robbery, and a man alleged by the plaintiffs to be the shooter, Amir Muhammad, had been named in the suit but were dropped before trial. They also were never arrested or charged.

B.I.G.

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wrongdoing by others after he was found to have stolen cocaine from an evidence room.

Perez was the focus of most of the recently discovered documents, which had been sitting in an LAPD detective's desk drawer until last month.

The detective said he forgot about them, a claim the judge called "absolutely incredible" during Tuesday's hearing.

The plaintiffs filed a motion Tuesday seeking a mistrial based on what they claimed was deliberate concealment of evidence and on the need for time to fur-

Rapper

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"Lil' Cease" Lloyd, the two witnesses who said they saw her with Butler and Jackson.

She said they were free-loading at her New Jersey townhouse. "I was just fed up," she told jurors. "They were taking advantage of me."

She was closely associated with the late Notorious B.I.G. Her career began with an impromptu street performance for Notorious B.I.G.

in their Brooklyn neighborhood. She became "Queen Bee," the only woman in his otherwise all-male clique.

Her 1996 debut album, "Hard Core," was laced with sexually explicit lyrics and became a big hit, thanks to songs like "Crush On You" and others with unmentionable titles.

In other legal problems, Lil' Kim was sued earlier this year by two men who say she failed to pay them for

songwriting and performing services for the 2003 album "La Bella Mafia," which sold more than 1 million copies.

The rapper arrived at the courthouse Wednesday with bodyguards who cleared her path through the waiting media.

Some fans also were there, proclaiming their support.

One man's T-shirt read: "Free Lil' Kim" and "Real Men Don't Snitch."

New NAACP chief plans high profile

*By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - NAACP President-elect Bruce S. Gordon, a retired Verizon executive, said that speculation that he has been hired as a corporate type who will be a quiet balance to the outspoken Board Chairman Julian Bond will soon be proven wrong.

"Some of the speculation early on was that Julian will be outside and Bruce will be inside. Nothing could be further from the truth. Don't even think it, okay?" said Gordon in an interview with the NNPA News Service.

"The organization has not hired an office manager, okay? It has hired a CEO. CEOs don't hide out in the back room. I'm going to be front and center. You're going to be hearing from me. I will be an active spokesperson. That is the role as the constitution of the NAACP defines it. So, don't for one second think that mine will be a soft-spoken voice."

Gordon succeeds Kweisi Mfume, whose contract was not renewed. There were reports that Mfume and Bond clashed as they shared the public spotlight.

Gordon, a 35-year veteran and executive of Verizon, retired two years ago as its president of Retail Markets in the Domestic Telecom unit.

"Black folks weren't in corporate America when I got there," he says. "That became, in my opinion, another civil rights battlefield, a new civil rights battlefield, and it required a different set of skills and a different set of learning experience. So, I think that Julian Bond is one type of civil rights leader, and he's a very important type and he's very effective at what he has and will continue to do. But I think that I'm another type of civil rights activist, and I happen to think that the skills and experiences, the background that I bring to the NAACP will broaden our ability, broaden our effectiveness, and I think that the two of us will make a very effective team."

Bond, a founder of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and former Georgia state legislator, has high expectations of Gordon.

Bond says, "He will bring the passion and commitment to justice that distinguished his corporate career."

Some critics are concerned about Gordon's lack of front-line civil rights experience. He says what they view as a negative is actually a positive.

"When you march, when you picket, when you protest, you're a force on the outside trying to make people on the inside change their policy because you're not at the table," Gordon explains. "... I wasn't trying to get in the door. I was in it. I wasn't trying to influence somebody from the outside in. I was inside making those decisions and influencing those decisions."

Gordon is set to give specifics of his vision for the
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Stamps

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priest in the 98 percent Black village of El Ciruelo in Guerrero state, and one of the signatories of the letter.

"What is evident is the level of tolerance of racism that exists in the country. We are accustomed to racism to the point where anyone who dares question it runs the risk of being considered unpatriotic," Jemmott said.

Rejecting the U.S. criticism and insisting they are not racist, Mexicans have been lining up to buy the stamps. One state has rationed sales because of high demand, and the stamps have been bid as high as \$200 per sheet in Internet auctions.

Mexicans are often accused of discrimination against Indians, who often live hand-to-mouth in poor communities.

Their lack of sensitivity to racism against Blacks may be worse because Mexicans so rarely see Black people.

Jemmott lives in one of a cluster of tight-knit Black communities along the Pacific coast, south of Acapulco, that are home to thousands of descendants of slaves. Many Mexicans are unaware the communities exist. In May, U.S. civil rights groups were outraged when Fox remarked that Mexican immigrants in the United States did jobs "not even Blacks" would do.