

OUR VIEW

State of Panic

According to a study released Wednesday by the United Way and Urban League of Los Angeles, Blacks in the City of Angels are living in hell. The study notes that Blacks in the nation's second largest city occupy the bottom rung in terms of criminal justice, economics, education, health and housing. Among the specific findings:

—Nearly half of Black high school students fail to graduate in four years and more than 75 percent of fourth-graders can't read proficiently; that number jumps to 83 percent by the 11th grade.

—On a scale of 1, Blacks scored .69 (Latinos .71, Asians .98 and Whites 1) on the equality index, which measures racial discrepancies in quality of life.

—Half of all the murder victims in L.A. County are Black and 32 percent of the Black males born in 2001 are expected to end up in prison.

—Blacks have the highest rate of homelessness (30 percent of the total population) and highest death rate (from homicide and HIV/AIDS), more than three times any other ethnic group.

"At the heart of this shortfall is a fundamental issue of equality — not simply equality as a right but equality as a reality and practice," the study stated.

More than sobering, this data is sickening and it speaks to failure. Failure on the part of Blacks, to be sure, for not mobilizing sooner to stop this genocidal behavior. Failure on the part of city leaders and state lawmakers who ignored the lessons of the Watts Riots some 40 years ago. Failure on the part of those individuals, businesses, educators, activists, clergy, policy makers, social architects and other movers and shakers for sitting idly by as a community slowly dies. This amounts to nothing less than "state-sponsored neglect." And for this, everyone in California—the nation, really—should be ashamed.

Blacks experiencing box-office bonanza

Quietly, 2005 is turning out to be a banner year in Black film. Seriously. In an excellent article in the July 10 issue of *The New York Times*, Ta-Nehisi Coates lists all of the accomplishments that have happened in the first seven months.

There were the Academy Awards, doled out in February, to the always-steady Morgan Freeman for his work in "Million Dollar Baby" and to Jamie Foxx for his deft portrayal of music icon Ray Charles in "Ray." On the Academy Award nomination front, Don Cheadle (the most talented actor you rarely hear of as a movie lead) and newcomer Sophie Okonedo garnered a record five nominations for the riveting "Hotel Rwanda." Add to this a string of movies directed by or starring Blacks that made it to No. 1 at the box office: Tyler Perry's "Diary of a Mad Black Woman" (\$50 million-plus in domestic sales); the Ice Cube vehicle "Are We There Yet?"; Samuel L. Jackson in "Coach Carter"; and Will Smith in "Hitch." July will see producer John Ridley's first "popcorn" film, the Marvel Comics-adapted "Fantastic Four," as well as "Hustle & Flow," starring star-on-the-rise Terrance Howard.

"I do think the tide is turning," Ridley told *The New York Times*. "Things are definitely moving forward. People look at Hollywood and say, 'I wish it was changing here or there.' But if I'd come in the business 10 years earlier, I wouldn't be where I am today."

Certainly, there's much to laud about this sudden bonanza in Black film. But, sadly, there's just as much to lament. Meaty roles and lead roles for Black actresses remain sparse—the situation is slightly better for the few Black actors with film credibility. Hollywood seems averse to showing positive relationships between Black men and women or healthy interracial relationships remain largely taboo, worried about racially polarizing mainstream (i.e. White) moviegoers.

When these barriers are usurped then, and only then, will box-office victory be truly won.



Old NAACP, new goal: Economics?

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

On June 25, the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization, the NAACP, selected Bruce Gordon as President-elect. He is a former senior executive at Verizon, and the selection is a drastic departure from many past NAACP leaders who were either ministers or politicians. He brings fundraising abilities, as well as keen management skills and the savvy to work with a cross section of America's corporations and organizations.

Can Bruce Gordon be the savior for the NAACP? It is now fighting financial worries, dealing with an IRS query into its non-profit status, and having its effectiveness questioned by the people it was formed to represent daily. Critics say the group's national stature is declining, and one reason is that the size and nature of its board is unwieldy and out of touch with mainstream Black America. There are 64 board members with a median age of 62. The median age for Black Americans in the 2000 census was 30 years of age.

At the very least, the NAACP is beginning to listen to what Black America is saying to them. In May 2005, in an unprecedented effort to identify Black leaders of the future, the NAACP hosted its first-ever conference with Black professionals and entrepreneurs between the ages



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

of 30- and 50-years-old to set a progressive civil rights agenda for the 21st century. The participants represented the areas of health, religion, politics, law, media, entertainment, economic development and education; not only having the will, but they have the wherewithal to help shape the future direction of social and economic justice advocacy efforts in America.

Not since it was formed 96 years ago, when Americans interested in forming the NAACP came together to fight for civil rights and to stop a wave of lynchings and race riots across the country, has the organization hosted such an ambitious gathering.

As the organization approaches its 100th anniversary celebration in 2009, it is wonderful to see the NAACP looking to increase the cadre of Black leaders in America and encouraging Black professionals to become more active. But can Gordon bridge the gap between Blacks who are successful in their professions and Blacks who are struggling to make ends meet? Can Gordon persuade Black business professionals to come on board, share with them, ask questions and listen to them?

Questions like, 'Is the NAACP relevant to you? And if not, how can it be?'

Only time will tell. At its national convention ending today, the NAACP will begin the quest to attract new people, enact new strategies and introduce Bruce Gordon to the NAACP membership. People are expecting great things from him; he is expected to offer a more aggressive civil rights agenda, modernize the NAACP's technological capabilities, forge new paths for Black businesses and reach out to young people for progressive ideas. One thing we know as Blacks is that the needs change but they never go away. And in order for us to make clear tangible progress

in the 21st century, we must be chameleons and adapt to our changing society. A couple of months ago in a speech at a forum held at the Clark County Government Center, Barack Obama stated that civil rights is our next battle. This statement reflects an unchanged and unchanging mindset.

We have been battling civil rights since the NAACP started nearly a century ago, and we will always battle civil rights to a degree. But for the most part, we have all the civil rights we're going to get. We can go to any school we want to go to, we can buy a house in any neighborhood we want to, we can eat at any restaurant we want to, we can drink at any water fountain we want to, etc. So, clearly understand that civil rights is not our next battle, and I hope that Mr. Gordon understands this also.

Our next battle is economics. White America loves for (See LaGrande, Page 11)



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