

# Missing white women spark media frenzy

By George Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Whether conscious or subconscious, the White-owned news media goes into a frenzy whenever there appears to be a White damsel in distress.

"Every few weeks, this stressed-out nation with more problems to worry about than hours in the day find time to become obsessed with the saga—it's always a 'saga,' never just a story — of a damsel in distress," Eugene Robinson wrote recently in the *Washington Post*. "Natalee Holloway, the student who disappeared while on a class trip to the Caribbean island of Aruba, is the latest in what seems to be an endless series.

"Holloway assumed the mantle from her predecessor, the Runaway Bride, who turned out not to have been in distress at all — not physical distress, at least, though it's obvious that the prospect of her impending 600-guest wedding caused Jennifer Wilbanks an understandable measure of mental trauma."

Robinson continued, "Before the Runaway Bride, there were too many damsels to provide a full list, but surely you remember the damsel elite: Laci Peterson, Elizabeth Smart, Lori Hacking, Chandra Levy, JonBenet Ramsey. We even created a damsel amid the chaos of war in Iraq: Jessica Lynch."

Judging by the saturated news coverage,

one would think that only White women are reported missing. According to the 46,600 active missing adult cases tracked by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 53 percent of the victims are men and 29.1 percent are African-Americans. But you'd never know it by the news coverage.

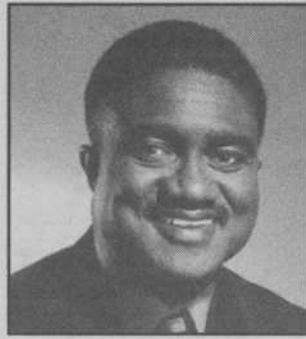
Howard Kurtz, a *Washington Post* media critic, acknowledged: "I've got to say, when you look at which missing-persons stories get covered (female, White, usually middle-class) and those that don't, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that selective news judgment is at work."

In an interview with Kurtz, Tom Rosentel, director of the Project for Excellence, was even more direct.

"To be blunt, blond, White chicks who go missing get covered; and poor, Black, Hispanic or other people of color who go missing do not get covered," he said. "You're more likely to get coverage if you're attractive than if you're not." In other words, if one is ugly, she is, also, out of luck.

Robinson, in his column, provided more specifics.

"A damsel must be White. This requirement is non-negotiable. It helps if her frame



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is of dimensions that breathless cable television reporters can credibly describe as 'petite,' and it also helps if she's the kind of woman who wouldn't really mind being called 'petite,' — a woman with a good deal of princess in her personality. She must be attractive — also non-negotiable. Her economic status should be middle class or higher, but an exception can be made in the case of wartime (see: Lynch)."

The news media's obsession with White damsels in distress can be attributed, in part, to the complexion of the nation's newsrooms. African-Americans are 12.5 percent of the U.S. population, according to the Census Bureau. A survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors revealed that Blacks are only 5.4 percent of U.S. newsrooms. In terms of African-Americans with decision-making power, those numbers are even smaller.

The industry remains largely-White while the country grows increasingly diverse. In 50 years, Whites will become a minority in the United States for the first time. Instead of making sure newsrooms reflect that diversity, employment of people of color peaked in previous years, and today, executives are

merely paying lip service to the cause of diversity or, in the case of the *New York Times*, redefining diversity so broadly that it will result in less emphasis on hiring African-Americans. Compounding the problem is the trend of frustrated Black journalists leaving the profession at a rate higher than their White counterparts.

In addition to the underemployment of African-Americans, we're seeing some White editors viewing the world through their own limited prisms.

Searching for an explanation, Robinson wrote: "It's the 'metanarrative' of something seen as precious and delicate being snatched away, defiled, destroyed by evil forces that lurk in the shadows, just outside the bedroom window. It's Whiteness under siege. It's innocence and optimism crushed by cruel reality. It's a flower smashed by a rock.

"Or maybe... the damsel thing is just a guaranteed cure for the slow news day. The cable news channels, after all, have lots of airtime to fill."

Slow news days notwithstanding, White damsels in distress are not the only ones suffering unfortunate and deadly fates. And the news coverage should not give that mistaken impression.

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# Shame on Black entertainers for dissing boycott

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

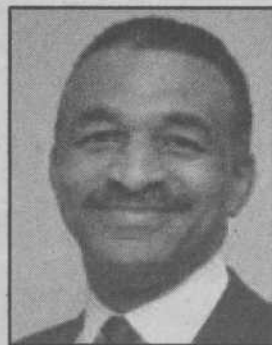
The front page of the *Cincinnati Herald*, a Black-owned newspaper, leaped out at me, with a quarter-page photo of Kanye West, and inset photos of Fantasia and Pattie LaBelle. The headline read, "Jazz Fest to offer variety of performances in 2005." The list of performers was a veritable who's who in R&B. In addition to those, there's Faith Evans, Angie Stone, the GAP Band, and Frankie Beverly and Maze, the Whispers, KEM, Anthony Hamilton, and something called the 112 group. Cincinnati, once again, was on the road to a weekend of euphoria during which we could forget about our troubles, and sing and dance the nights away, spending millions of dollars in the process, of course.

An inside look at what is now called the Macy's Music Festival, brought to us by Joe Santangelo and his band of merry Black men and women, will reveal an effort to get Black people to come back downtown, despite the three-year boycott, similar to the Miami boycott during the early 1990s. It is an effort to lull Black folks into a stadium that was com-

mandeered by a White politician who now works for Mike Brown, owner of the Cincinnati Bengals, and now "owner" and controller of the \$500 million stadium — complete with concession rights.

The stadium is a monument to the dysfunction of Cincinnati taxpayers who voted affirmatively to build it, but it is an even greater representation of Black dysfunction because of the meager economic benefits it provided during its construction and now during the 30- to 40-year life of the asset. Black folks, especially those in Cincinnati who would now go there for any occasion are short-sighted at best. But everyone has free will.

It's the same with the entertainers who are scheduled to appear at the stadium for the Macy's Music Festival (By the way, Santangelo put the word out on the radio for Black folks to buy their festival "outfits" at Macy's. Yeah, right, big Joe). Many of these same entertainers know about the boycott;



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they know the reasons for it and yet they choose to come to this city and participate in the economic empowerment of folks that continue to oppress Blacks in Cincinnati. (Let any them get mistreated, and see who they call on for support. That's right, the same brothers and sisters who are fighting for justice here in Cincinnati.)

A condescending aspect of the festival that will be "another step toward healing our city," according to John Pace, the Black promoter working with Santangelo, is the give-back. Ticket prices are \$48, \$68 and \$88. Santangelo has promised to give \$2 of every ticket sold to a group of "well known" organizations. That's right; I said \$2! At the highest level of participation, that would mean a few thousand dollars to each of the five organizations he designated.

Isn't it reasonable to think, at least for the Black organizations Santangelo chose, that Blacks could donate \$2 each to them? Does it make sense for a White man to collect \$2 from Black people and then dole it back out to Black organizations and other social programs? We could do that ourselves simply by pooling our money and taking care of our own organizations. Nevertheless, thank you, Mr. Santangelo; you are a real saint. Hey, \$2 per ticket sold — thanks a bunch!

The most negative aspect of this scenario is not Joe Santangelo and his jaded philanthropic gesture. He is a businessman, in this to make money; no problem there, folks. So, please don't blame him; he can only do what we allow him to do. If no one goes to the festival, he loses money and will seek other venues, the way he did at the height of the Cincinnati boycott. The very sad and disturbing aspect of this situation involves the en-

tertainers and the prospective patrons of the festival.

Again, folks can do whatever they want with their money, and they can sell their talents to whomever they choose. But for Black people to have such a low level of consciousness when it comes to standing together for one another, no matter where injustice exists, shows how far we have to go to obtain even a modicum of economic, political, social, and educational success on a collective level.

Yes, I am ashamed of the Black entertainers who know about the struggles of their brothers and sisters in Cincinnati and yet are willing to sing and dance in a stadium that is the symbol of inequity and unfairness, even if they do hold their noses in the process. I am ashamed of brothers in the GAP Band, who hail from a place that survived and thrived because of Black unity and mutual support, a place once called Black Wall Street — the Greenwood district in Tulsa.

I am ashamed of the Whispers and KEM, who see what is taking place in Los Angeles everyday. I am ashamed of Frankie Beverly and Pattie LaBelle, who have been contacted personally about what is happening in Cincinnati. I am ashamed of Kanye West, Fantasia, and Faith Evans. Although they are relatively young, I am sure they read the papers sometime or watch TV sometime. I am ashamed of all those Black entertainers who would take the filthy lucre offered them to come to a city that has a reputation of doing everything it can to suppress Black economic empowerment and fairness for Black people in its criminal justice system.

But my being ashamed, and about \$2.50 in most states, might just buy you a gallon of gasoline. Let the party begin!

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## LaGrande

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us to sit around and talk about civil rights this and civil rights that while they continue to play the game of capitalism, becoming richer, which ensures that the income gap between Blacks and Whites widens. Capitalism is defined as the economic system in which all means of production and distribution of goods are owned by private individuals and corporations for profit. Profit breeds prosperity. If Blacks studied capitalism more, played the game of capitalism better, and then establish a financial infrastructure whereby we wouldn't need anything from or be solely dependent on White America for our survival,

we, too, would be prosperous. President elect Gordon already seems to be headed in the right direction. If the 64-member, social-minded, board doesn't interfere, doesn't require that Mr. Gordon be a voice box for the Democratic Party and lets Mr. Gordon do his job, then the NAACP may have made an excellent choice and be well on its way to regaining the respect and trust of the whole Black community — not just a small part of it. Bruce Gordon has built a career on success, and this success, if channeled down the right path, can translate into success for the nation's oldest civil rights organization and Blacks as a whole.