

# NAACP urged to take on corporate America

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - NAACP leaders say the 96-year-old civil rights organization is holding fast to its historic mission, but some civil rights advocates say it must return to its grassroots activism in order to step up progress for African-Americans.

"The NAACP must go back to the basics of being a grassroots day-to-day civil rights organization and not an institution that puts out press releases, but an institution that can confront not only government but also the private sector to live up to its moral obligations," said Donna Brazile, a respected political strategist who attended the organization's convention in Milwaukee.

"We have to have a parallel strategy to confront all of those with power and influence over our daily lives. It's time that [corporations] give back and understand that they also play a role in the economic growth and development of the Black community."

In order to hold private sector businesses accountable, the NAACP must cut

some of its corporate ties and become more independent and financed by its own members, said Julia Hare, co-founder of the Black Think Tank, based in San Francisco.

"We'll go and we'll have those conventions and these meetings and have corporations to finance them — the same corporations that you're going to have to go to and say, 'Wait a minute, what about your hiring policies? What about your reparations policies?'" said Hare. "We go to the fanciest White hotels to sit inside and discuss Black poverty and White racism and the racists have funded you. No other group would depend on the person they are trying to get their freedom from for sponsorship... Whoever is paying those bills for you, whoever is funding you, they're going to call the shots, and rightfully so."

Major corporations frequently underwrite the conventions and activities of Black organizations. Among the NAACP corporate sponsors this year were Wachovia Bank, Bank of America, Southland Corporation, Hilton and Marriott.



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Political strategist

In the NAACP 2005 Economic Reciprocity Initiative (ERI) industry report cards, released during the convention, the five industries — lodging, telecommunications, financial services, general merchandising and automotive — all earned only average and below average scores. Corporations are graded on Black participation in vending, board of directors, property ownership, and financial giving to Black organizations.

Both Hilton and Marriott, among sponsors of this year's convention, scored highest among lodging corporations, with each receiving only a B minus.

Verizon, where new NAACP President and CEO Bruce Gordon won wide ac-

claim for his Black hiring efforts before his retirement two years ago, got an overall grade of B on the current report card.

Gordon said when he was at Verizon, the corporation got a C on the NAACP corporate report card and he helped to get it up to a B.

Gordon, who begins his new job Aug. 1, said he disagrees with Hare that a corporation can control the NAACP just because it is a corporate sponsor. But there should be repercussions for companies that consistently refuse to respond or do poorly on the corporate report card, he said.

"B is not a bad grade, it's just not a good enough grade. So, should I punish a company that consistently gets

B's? Absolutely not. Why would I do that? Particularly when there are some companies that are getting poorer grades or not participating," said Gordon. "My first priority is addressing the companies that get F's because what they are effectively saying is, 'We don't care'... If I find that there's a company year after year, which refuses to submit a grade or submit information, then that means it's time to talk to the membership of the organization or talk to the community and tell them that these could very well be companies with whom we should not do business."

Brazile acknowledges that the NAACP has waged successful boycotts against major corporations, but it's time to look closer at their dealings with the community and take action.

"What I'm doing is saying we can do more than release statements and materials. That's fine, but that doesn't get us where we need to go. We have to go back to the old strategy of marching and mobilizing," Brazile said.

During the civil rights movement, a large part of the

street mobilization came from the Black church, working hand-in-hand with the NAACP. The NAACP must return to partnership to be at its most powerful, said Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree.

"We see Black church leaders sort of going out on their own on many issues and no longer seem to be as supportive of the NAACP as they did during the civil rights movement," Ogletree said. "I think the organization hasn't understood how important it is to have a direct link with the Black clergy in terms of the members of its board, in terms of to what extent there is some consciousness and spiritual connection that most African-Americans have as a central part of their lives."

While NAACP Chairman Julian Bond told the convention audience that the next Supreme Court justice to replace retiring Sandra Day O'Connor will be the highest priority of the NAACP over the next several months, long-time civil rights attorney Thomas Todd said education seems forgotten.

"They talk about all these (See NAACP, Page 7)

## Sears a judicial pioneer in Ga.

By Maynard Eaton  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

ATLANTA (NNPA) - Leah Sears has always wanted to be an attorney, and the 50-year-old jurist has always been a history maker. She has "always been used to busting through," as she often says.

Her biggest and most significant breakthrough took place on June 28 when she became the first female Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court. She is also believed to be the first African-American woman to become chief justice of any state supreme court in the country.

On hand to salute the occasion was fellow Savannah native Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas who called the standing-room only ceremony at the state capitol an especially important day.

"I am confident, having gotten to know you, that you will prosper, that you will excel, and that you will do justice," he told Sears proudly. "I know that you will call them as you see them, and I know that you will do that well. For those of us who are judges, you know that it is easy to judge when you already have your mind made up. It is hard to judge when you have to make up your mind."

Thomas added in his deep baritone voice, "I never thought that in my lifetime that I would witness a Black woman as Chief Justice of Georgia's Supreme Court. I never thought I would live this long."

In 1982, Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young appointed the 27-year-old Sears to her first judgeship on Atlanta's traffic court at the behest of his oldest daughter, then a law school student. Young's daughter told him

Black female attorneys needed experience on the bench so they could move up the judicial ladder.

That's exactly what Sears did — winning a 1988 election for a Fulton Superior Court judgeship. Then in 1992, Gov. Zell Miller made Sears the first woman — and the youngest ever — to serve on the Georgia Supreme Court. Despite fierce challenges each time she sought re-election Sears' accumulated seniority on the court and took her seat in the coveted chief justice position.

"We must remember that the founders of this great nation of ours intended the judicial branch of government to be a separate, independent, co-equal branch of government that answers not to public opinion nor politicians but only to the laws and the constitution of the state of Georgia and United States of America," she said. "As chief justice, I will strive mightily to uphold the independence and integrity of the judicial branch."

Sears, a moderate jurist, has been labeled and criticized as being a liberal activist — a charge she vehemently rejects. Despite being opposed by Gov. Sonny Perdue, who shunned the historic event, Sears survived a brutal campaign winning 146 of Georgia's 159 counties.

"Having named an African-American woman in a leadership position in the state says a lot about how fast Georgia has progressed," Sears said.

"It always tastes better if you've had to work for it. I had to work for it; so, I think I have earned it."

Maynard Eaton writes for the Atlanta Voice.

## Expertise Student of the Month

Nail Technician, Amber Hogan was named student of the month just days before her graduation last week. She plans to display her nail-designing talent in an area salon soon after she passes her State Board Exam. "The State Board is running about a month behind in testing" she explained, "It's [waiting to take the test] a hiccup in my plans... like life sometimes you have to make adjustments." Hogan chose the four month program because she needed to "master a guaranteed career," which offered flexible hours in addition to having the potential to earn maximum dollars in a minimum period of time. "This career is a good fit for me". This fall, Hogan will be attending The University of Las Vegas (UNLV) in pursuit of a Bachelor's of Science degree in counseling. The native Las Vegas, Cimarron High School, class of 2004 graduate said that her ultimate desire is to become an entrepreneur.



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