

Putting Johnson's life in perspective tough

By George Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When someone dies, especially if they are well known, there is a tendency to exaggerate his or her contributions. Such was the case with John H. Johnson, the late publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines.

Without a doubt, Johnson's contributions to journalism and improving the lives of African-Americans are exceptional and need no embellishment. There is no question that when Johnson launched *Ebony* in 1945, he altered the face of the magazine industry for good. Six years later, he built on that foundation by starting *Jet*. Perhaps more than anyone else, Johnson forced major corporations to advertise with Black publications and insisted that they use Black models and advertising agencies. As lawyers like to say, I'll stipulate the foregoing.

Where I part company with the revisionists is when they proclaim — incorrectly — that *Ebony* magazine was the first publication to reflect Black America in its full complexity. That's simply untrue. That honor belongs to Black newspapers. The first one, *Freedom's Journal*, was started in 1827 — more than a century before the first issue of *Ebony* was published.

Like the NAACP, Black newspapers bravely conducted anti-lynching campaigns. The office of — Ida B. Wells Barnett — was

torched in Memphis, forcing her to leave town. The famous W.E.B. DuBois — Booker T. Washington debate had its seeds in the Black press. Contrary to population impressions, DuBois did not object to industrial education; he objected when it was advocated to the exclusion of Black economic, political and social rights. In fact, Washington offered DuBois a job at what is now Tuskegee University in Alabama, but DuBois had already accepted a teaching position at Wilberforce University in Ohio.

William Monroe Trotter, editor of the *Boston Guardian*, was far more critical of Washington than DuBois. In fact, upon learning that Booker T. would be speaking in Boston, he planted a stink bomb in the church. When Trotter was roundly excoriated by Blacks, DuBois sprung to his defense.

As noted above, Black newspapers were aggressively defending the rights of African-Americans before John H. Johnson was born. Black newspapers chronicled the modern Civil Rights Movement, which began in 1955 with the slaying of 14-year-old Emmett Till for allegedly whistling at a White woman. *Jet* published that unforgettable photo of Till's mutilated body. But Blacks newspapers



GEORGE CURRY

covered his accusers' trial and conducted their own investigation into the murder.

This is no attempt to denigrate John H. Johnson. Rather, it's an attempt to set the record straight.

African-Americans have a bad habit of spending more time looking at life through the rear view mirror than the windshield of the future. Instead of only celebrating Johnson's accomplishments, let's see if there are lessons we can learn from his life.

One of the things I admired about John H. Johnson was his refusal to sell to the highest bidder and, in the process, claim he was acting as any businessperson would. That can't be said of the sellouts of today.

Whether in publishing or broadcasting, we see example after example of Black entrepreneurs asking to be carried on certain cable systems or given certain ads because African-American consumers deserve to be treated with respect.

However, once large sums of money are waved in front of them, they sell out the community, usually saying it's not about Black or White — it's about green.

They neglect to acknowledge that the green they're amassing is a direct result of

their having pimped our Blackness.

We've already witnessed the sale of Motown, Johnson hair care products, BET, *Essence*, BlackVoices.com and Africana.com to Whites. The *New York Times* plans to start a 'Black' newspaper in Gainesville, Fla. Given the recent population shifts, you can expect this trend to continue.

My issue is not whether we should help swell the ranks of Black millionaires. My real concern is the decrease in the number of legitimate sources of news and information for and by people of color.

There are more than 18,821 magazines in the U.S., according to the Magazine Publishers Association. Yet, we can name the number of substantive national Black magazines on one hand and still have a finger or two left over.

Considering today's right-wing assault on human rights, we need strong Black publications more than ever. We need to preserve and expand what we have. In the end, it won't matter if we create profitable Black businesses if all we do is sell out and leave our community devoid of outlets.

John H. Johnson proved that one can be a millionaire and have integrity at the same time.

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GOP push to court Blacks smacks of cynicism

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I recently read an article about the alleged efforts of the Republican Party to reach out to African-Americans. Apparently, one of the messages conveyed by the Republican Party leadership is that the Republicans are the party of Lincoln, and, therefore, African-Americans should return to the fold. I almost fell out of my chair laughing.

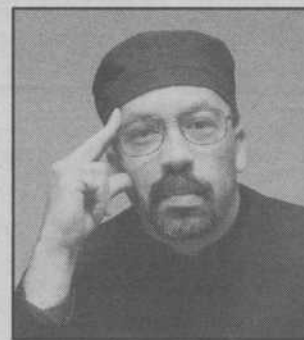
There are a few points I would like to offer for your consideration in thinking through this cynical maneuver by the Republicans. Yes, the Republican Party was the party of Lincoln, but they were also the party that opposed the New Deal reforms during the Depression; the party that welcomed the Dixiecrats into their fold after they left the Democratic Party; the party that used the noxious Southern strategy to appeal to White voters to turn their backs on the Democrats (because the Democrats had allegedly become the party of Black people); the party of Reagan who gave ideological blessing to the notion that racism was over; the party of Reagan who increased defense spending at

the expense of domestic needs wrecking services and community-based organizations.

So, yes, they were once the party of Lincoln, but the more recent record, to be balanced, is a bit weak when it comes to the needs of African-Americans.

Yet, the appeal is interesting because what the Republicans are saying is that while they are the non-Black party (as opposed to the Democrats, which are, allegedly, the party of minorities and other special interests), they will make space for Black people — as long as we do not hope to advance a Black agenda. So, as long as we do not raise issues about affirmative action, police brutality, urban economic development, racially discriminatory health care, U.S. intervention in countries such as Haiti, etc., it is okay for us to be in the Republican Party. That is a very interesting set of qualifiers.

Yet, the response of some well-intentioned African-Americans to the Republican appeal,



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more than anything else, seems to reflect growing anger and frustration with the Democratic Party and its waffling on issues facing people of color, women and working people generally. As the Democratic Party's so-called "centrism" increases such that Democratic Party leaders and candidates attempt to out-Republican the Republicans, this promotes a combination of cynicism, anger and despair. When the Democrats ignore their traditional bases until about three weeks prior to an election, African-Americans quite rightly feel taken for granted.

So, the Republican outreach to African-Americans, and the fact that a few African-Americans have responded to this, speaks to the crisis over the future of the Democratic Party. As wealth further polarizes people in the U.S.; as the U.S. engages in illegal wars and interventions overseas; as workers find it nearly impossible to sustain a decent living standard without going into major debt;

as housing and rental costs in our cities skyrocket; as workers find it more and more difficult to join or form labor unions for fear of employer harassment or firing, the question that emerges is: What political party speaks for us?

I am less worried about African-Americans being seduced in any great numbers by the Republican Party than I am the problem of despair and dropping out.

What is glaring is that there is a need for a set of politics, much like those represented by Rev. Jesse Jackson in his two presidential campaigns in the 1980s, that speaks to the average person and their growing exclusion from the possibility of a hopeful and fulfilling life.

This means a politics that promotes fighting back and fills us with enthusiasm about changing the priorities of this country.

So, now it is up to us to ask the broader questions: Who speaks for us? And, what do we want said?

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(Continued from Page 10)

is detected. Complicating matters, there is no reliable screening method to detect lung cancer. Chest x-rays are of little help. In many cases, the disease has spread to other parts of the body before the x-rays pick up malignant growth in the lungs.

Lung cancer is grouped into two broad types. The first type categorizes a tumor as one that has very small but very fast growing cells. The other type is considered not as fast growing. Small cell lung cancer responds well to chemotherapy but can double in size within a month and spread fast to other parts of the body. Cell cancers other than the smaller size respond better to surgery than

chemotherapy.

The mortality rates for lung cancer for men and women are chilling. Though hard to conceive, again, it kills more Americans annually than breast cancer, ovarian cancer, colon cancer and prostate cancer — combined. The low survival rates are disturbing. Sixty percent of patients die within a year of diagnosis and 85 percent succumb within five years.

Is there anything that can be done to help women break the alarming trend? Since 80 percent of women who contract lung cancer are smokers, clearly we need to learn from the success of initiatives that have successfully reduced the mortality from breast cancer,

namely those measures aimed at awareness. Holistic, aggressive, woman-to-woman, straight talk campaigns can greatly expand awareness as they inform and empower. These campaigns must address the social factors that make our young girls so vulnerable to tobacco marketers.

We need to look at issues and barriers to change, including body image issues, smoking and dieting, and the desire for independence and equality. We must also deal with the woman's unique role as a mother, especially since 13 to 22 percent of women in the U.S. continue to smoke cigarettes during pregnancy.

For all women, smokers and nonsmokers

alike, if you experience any of the following it is recommended that you see your physician:

- A cough that will not go away over several weeks. Smokers may see a change in the frequency or severity of an already persistent cough.
- Chest, shoulder or back pain that doesn't go away and is made worse by deep breathing.
- Increased wheezing.
- Shortness of breath; or
- Bloody coughs.

Lung cancer in women deserves all of our attention. Let's work together to fight and prevent it.