

Black leadership out of focus with priorities

By George Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan created a stir recently when he agreed with a controversial statement made by Mexico's president about immigrants taking low-paying jobs that even African-Americans don't want. Speaking in Milwaukee earlier this month, Farrakhan said, "Vicente Fox was not wrong when he said the Mexican takes jobs that even Blacks in America don't want."

Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton accused Fox of being insensitive and flew to Mexico to tell him so in person. They met with Fox on separate days, holding their own news conference to recount their conversations with Fox. Even after the visits, Fox did not back down from his original statement. Subsequently, he supported the issuance of Mexican stamps that had stereotypical images of Black people that was far more insulting than his original statement.

Having witnessed first-hand how Farrakhan's words have been distorted in the past, I decided to request a copy of the Milwaukee speech from the Nation of Islam. They sent me a CD and DVD of the speech overnight so I could hear Minister Farrakhan's words for myself.

According to a recording of Farrakhan's speech, he asked: "Why are you so foolishly sensitive when somebody is telling the truth?" He drew laughter when he told the audience, "You picked cotton so long, you don't want to see a farm. Even if you own it, you get away from it."

I, too, thought the Vicente Fox incident was overblown and said so in one of my regular appearances on NPR's "News and Notes with Ed Gordon." I agree that Fox should have been more careful in his word selection. To say that Hispanics were taking jobs that "even" Blacks don't want, implied that as far as Americans go, one couldn't get any lower than African-Americans. If you remove the word "even," there's nothing to complain about. The truth is, immigrants from Mexico are taking jobs that neither Blacks nor Whites want.

Having covered civil rights leaders for more than three decades, I know that the most dangerous place on the planet is to stand between some of them and a TV camera. You take your life into your hands if you do that. Let's be honest and state that the trips by Jack-



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son and Sharpton to Mexico were taken, in part, to gain publicity. I don't doubt their sincerity, but I also know their history. Most of us whisper this among ourselves, but unlike Farrakhan, don't say it publicly.

What bothered me about their trips to Mexico was they undertook Mission Impossible just as the battle over George Bush's next nominee to the Supreme Court was heating up. Given the choice between whether the president of Mexico used imprecise language and the selection to fill a Supreme Court vacancy, Jackson and Sharpton should have headed to Washington, not Mexico City.

This Vicente Fox fiasco points to a need for a more balanced style of national leadership. Seeing the walls of segregation crumble in my hometown of Tuscaloosa, Ala., I am not one to say that marching or street demonstrations are not still needed. But we must insist on fewer publicity gimmicks and more emphasis on the less glamorous work, such as education. We need to not only narrow the achievement gaps between Blacks and

Whites, but between Black males and Black females. To his credit, Hugh Price tried to steer the civil rights movement in that direction during his tenure at the National Urban League. Each of the major civil rights groups has major initiatives in education, but no group is doing enough.

Of course, there is the usual rhetoric about providing the same accolades for academic excellence that we as a community provide for athletics. One of the most effective programs is the NAACP's ACT-SO program created by the late Vernon Jarrett. My friend Dr. Donald Suggs has a banquet each year to honor educational excellence in St. Louis and many other local groups have similar programs. But all of us need to do more. A report by the American Council on Education notes that twice as many Black women as Black men now attend college. That has enormous implications for every aspect of our community. Concentrating on keeping our young people in college and out of the criminal justice trap will be much more rewarding, in the end, than rushing to Mexico for a photo op and press conference.

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Black "media by us" overcomes dominant media bias

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

During an appearance on "America's Black Forum," which dealt with the sale of Black-owned businesses to White companies, we discussed the recent sale of *Essence* magazine to Time-Warner. I made the point that it is vital for conscious Black Americans to own and control media outlets in order to tell our own stories and to report the news from a Black perspective. We complain a lot about the portrayal of Black people by dominant media outlets, but we continue to support them, and we continue to sell ours, or we use them to perpetuate the stereotypical images of ourselves with daily (and nightly) buffoonery.

A highly relevant reference is the historic observation by Frank W. Quillan in 1910: "When a Negro commits a crime, the newspapers always emphasize his race connection by such headlines as 'A Big Black Burly Brute of Negro' does such and such, and the whole race gets a share of the blame; while

if the crime is committed by a White man, race is not mentioned, and the individual gets the blame."

Have things changed from that scenario?

Nearly 100 years later, Black folks in this country are still subjected to the same treatment in dominant media. But we already know that, don't we? The points I want to highlight are exemplified in two recent observations I made, which you also may have noticed, from articles published in *USA Today*.

The first is on a story titled "Taking the Pulse of Bush's America" about how folks in Lexington, Ky, perceived George Bush. The writer interviewed several persons, and several photos accompanied the piece. The striking part of the article, for me, was the photo of a Black woman talking to her granddaughter in front of a housing project called



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Bluegrass-Aspendale. The caption under the photo of 2-year-old Amoni Price and her grandmother, Jackie Price, stated, "Drugs, Crime, Vacancies..."

The subliminal and obvious messages in the article jumped off the page. I searched the article for comments from Jackie Price but found none; thus, they used a photo of a Black woman and associated that photo with the most negative aspects of the piece, and did not include comments from Price in the article.

Some may think this is a minor concern, but the power of pictures cannot be overstated. Also, the article reminded me of Quillan's words from 1910, which, by the way, were referring to my hometown newspapers in Cincinnati. No surprise there.

My second observation is even more important. We have seen the accolades heaped

upon John H. Johnson since his death; we have heard his story of starting with \$500 in 1942 and creating the \$500 million empire, Johnson Publishing Company. We know he was an icon in this country, and his rise to the top was, and still is, one of the most significant in our history.

Again, *USA Today*, on the same day it did a two-page feature on Peter Jennings, gave a relatively small space and, quite honestly, short shrift to John Johnson. We can debate the issue of who made the more significant contributions to this society. But, it's a relative perspective anyway. And, I think, it's incontrovertible that Johnson's accomplishments exceeded those of Jennings, especially when we consider the barriers Johnson faced.

Nonetheless, the real issue is how the two were treated in the same issue of the paper and, I might add, by the dominant media in general. That is why Black people must own and control our media and the messages that come from them. For this very reason —

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needs of the Hispanic community? Is he trying to force the six Hispanic radio stations and the four Hispanic TV stations to meet the needs of the Black community? No. His contention is that because KCEP is not owned by a corporation it is different.

What about just having the Hispanic community's needs met, regardless of who is providing the information? And with Hispanics owning so many broadcasting stations, I believe that their needs are being met very well.

The Black community has one radio station, so why would Fernando Romero or any others want to strip us of that one?

Our community has as much right to have a station geared towards meeting its needs as the Hispanics do. And if the Black community allows Fernando and his comrades to try to use this issue to inflame the community

by pitting Hispanics against Blacks, then shame on us.

Is he trying to force NALA or the Latin Chamber of Commerce or most Mexican restaurants to hire Black people? No. Pay attention the next time you go to a Hispanic restaurant to see how many Blacks you see employed there. EOB has around 120 Hispanic employees out of approximately 600 and will have more when Head Start opens.

In conclusion, KCEP has an FCC license, which cannot be changed, allowing it to broadcast as a community-oriented, nonprofit radio station. If the board, which has the ultimate fiduciary responsibility and oversight for the agency, is not happy with whether the radio station is meeting the mission of the agency, then all it needs to do is reorganize the format; but they don't need to sell the station.

A former board member, Chester

Richardson, was quoted in the same news article stating, "Hip-hop and gospel are all good for the soul — but it does little for empowerment of the poor." He is absolutely right. So, structure the radio station so it does truly empower people.

The station can continue to generate funds by truly focusing on issues pertinent to economic empowerment and self sufficiency. They can deal with a myriad of racial health disparities and other disparities, one by one, disease by disease, and have the various hospitals, doctors, medical centers and health professionals underwrite shows on those subjects.

Black wealth is on the decline, so they can have insurance companies, financial planners, financial institutions and successful Black business mentors underwrite shows that could be called "Black Wealth," and then deal with issues such as tax incentives, build-

ing wealth through real estate, building wealth through retirement planning, etc.

Black children are at the bottom of the educational ladder. Solicit the school district, the community college, the State of Nevada, the teachers' union and hotels to underwrite shows on education topics, such as parental rights and responsibilities and the district's initiatives under the "No Child Left Behind" legislation; opportunities to get help, especially for low-income parent's and students; programs and procedures for families with children attending the Clark County School District, etc.

There are plenty of ways and reasons to maintain control of KCEP and get adequate funding at the same time. I admonish the board of directors to look for reasons to keep the radio station and not look at the radio station as a quick fix for problems the agency has gotten itself into over the years.