

# Black civil rights groups deserve support

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

During the Thanksgiving holiday, I listened to an interview of Bruce Gordon, the new head of the NAACP, with Brian Lamb on C-SPAN's "Questions and Answers" program.

It was an interesting discussion and mostly about Gordon's life and his perspective on the work of the NAACP.

One thing struck me: the budget of the organization, now \$24 million a year. So, one of Gordon's objectives is to raise enough money to endow parts of the organization. To me, that should be an easy task, but I want to call attention here to the contradiction between the vastness of our expectations of such organizations and the lack of our measuring up to the funding necessary to meet them.

Why do I say that? Well, let's see: Forward Lattrell Sprewell was mad at the Knicks because he didn't make the average salary of \$5 million per year; wide receiver Terrell Owens dissed the Philadelphia Eagles because his \$46 million, 10-year contract wasn't enough; Halle Berry and Denzel Washington now are able to demand \$7 to \$10 million per movie; we have scores of Black millionaires in significant corporate jobs beginning with the CEO of Time Warner Corp.; the budget of Howard University, a Black organization, is now more than \$500 million per year; and Oprah Winfrey and Bob Johnson (and his ex-wife, Sheila) are Black

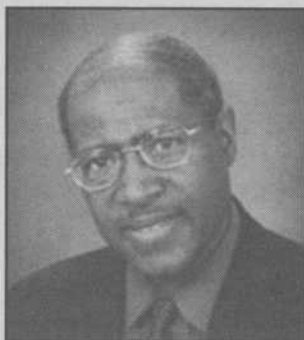
billionaires. In fact, I could put together 100 Black people with disposable incomes of \$1 million per year, an amount that would triple the NAACP budget, but just one of the billionaires could endow the entire organization.

My point is that there is something wrong with our commitment to achieving social justice that affects our integrity when our fighting organizations have among the lowest budgets in the Black community. Why shouldn't the NAACP national budget be at least \$50 to \$100 million per year?

Our people have benefited from the legal genius that fought to provide for integrated education in both K-12 and White colleges and universities, so that the Black middle class could go through and take advantage of the opportunities that now yield them untold riches.

The courage of many overcame barriers to home ownership, business ownership, access to political power, and leveraged these assets to become players in the corporate world, managing billions of other people's money, but very often deciding not to give back to Blacks.

In a substantial way, we have become comfortable with that decision and settled for the chump change that is doled out by Black



RON WALTERS

surrogates of major corporations who give just enough to get our organizations through a given annual conference with the sponsorship of receptions, the purchase of booth spaces and modest contributions to the overall causes.

The pain is that this kind of funding is not consistent with our clout within the Democratic Party, or with our

clout in the consumer market for autos, CDs, DVDs, sneakers, movies or other things. In short, we forgo the millions upon millions of dollars that our causes deserve and accept that which settles everybody's conscience and avoids confrontation. It's a cozy relationship, but ultimately lacking in integrity, honesty and substance.

So, let me ask again. Why are our fighting organizations the least well off? Politically, it could be because their mandate is to speak truth to power. But the nature of the truth is gentle enough to keep the chump change coming.

This is not a White problem, because the leadership of American corporations has followed the path of least resistance with Black leaders for a long time.

It is a problem that exists with our leadership not driving a hard enough line with either Whites or Blacks in revealing the scope of resources such as: staff, research, press,

facilities, publication, mobilization, etc., necessary to be effective in an era dominated by conservatism, and by the lack of Black social movement. Here, they could learn from the brash youth who run part of the hip-hop universe who have the guts to demand money for their art and to throw down if they don't get it.

I don't mean to elevate the hip-hoppers too high, however, because they are, in some ways, worse than the Black middle class, raising billions in serious cash and not knowing or caring how to positively impact the quality of life for most Black people.

To see the massive economic resources wasted in the rapper's world of mindless materialism and the lack of a strategic direction for mass development is to see the missing element in the resources for our grassroots social and political struggle and the seeds of new Black-controlled corporate empires.

As Gordon takes over the reigns of the NAACP, he joins the National Urban League, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Rainbow Coalition and other fighting organizations — our spear-carriers — who have little firepower at the end of the day, but great expectations from Black America. Something is wrong with this picture that only a dose of real commitment, vision and put-up-or-shut-up can change. Merry Christmas.

Ron Walters is the director of the African-American Leadership Institute.

## Personal responsibility and ujima, collective community work

By Marian Wright Edelman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Friday before Thanksgiving, Terrell Pough died after being shot in the back of his head outside his Philadelphia home as he returned from work. Terrell, an 18-year-old student at the Philadelphia Youth Build Charter School, had no history of violence. In fact, he was featured in *People* magazine three months ago as an outstanding single father.

He was devoted to his 2-year-old daughter Diamond, and he was determined to do the right thing by going to school, working hard and raising his daughter well.

Above all else, he wanted to be sure his daughter knew he cared. In a society where Black men are too often absent as role models and fathers in poor communities, Terrell Pough was both.

His heartbreaking and senseless death is a profound loss.

In a word, Terrell Pough was responsible. In the past year and a half, public attention has increasingly focused on the issue of personal responsibility, especially within the Black community. Against a larger cultural backdrop that values \$250 sneakers and glorifies hate and violence-filled rap lyrics, some people focus on asking why parents are not doing a better job raising their children. Why are they not keeping them off the streets and teaching them right from wrong?

Yes, parents must do everything in their power to be responsible and raise their children well. But decades of extreme poverty, racism, violence, neglect and other inequities exacerbated and fed by cultural vio-

lence have rendered many adults incapable of shepherding their children to a better place, without help that is. These same forces have created economic and neighborhood conditions that make post-traumatic stress an everyday risk for many children.

Blaming parents for these conditions, some systemic and some personal, doesn't change the alarming reality that their children are on a path that increasingly leads to delinquency, prison or even death, rather than productive adulthood.

Terrell Pough had beaten many odds. He was playing by the rules and was a model of personal responsibility. Yet, he was killed by violence outside the house, where his toddler daughter waited for him. The destructive forces that shaped the lives of many of the other young people in his neighborhood proved powerful enough to claim his life, too. In a war zone, innocents die, too.

The violence that ended his life plagues far too many impoverished cities. Young people like Terrell grow up in neighborhoods where church doors are closed in fear and recreation centers and after-school programs are shut down by budget cuts. They live in communities where the police no longer walk the streets or know the people because funding has taken a back seat to the proclaimed war on terrorism in Iraq.

I believe deeply that the vast majority of parents in these neighborhoods want to be good parents. They want to keep their children safe and hope their children will lead



Marian Wright Edelman

good and satisfying lives.

But their hopes are no match for the daily hopelessness and despair of grinding, unrelenting poverty and dangerous neighborhoods overrun by drug dealers, gunshots and violence.

A decade ago, amidst record homicide levels, an alliance of law enforcement, public officials, faith leaders, service providers, businesses and concerned citizens formed in Boston.

These committed people decided that the killing of young people by young people must stop, and they dropped their job titles and egos and made it happen. It was called the "Boston Miracle," as the Ten Point Coalition formed and stayed the course.

But the "Boston Miracle" was more than just an innovative and collaborative community solution. Its cornerstone was this: every single political and community leader assumed responsibility for his or her part in stopping the violence.

When the leaders had assumed responsibility for their roles, they told the gang members it was their turn to be accountable and that they must stop the violence — and it worked.

Juvenile homicides dropped to zero, and homicides among young adults under age 25 dropped two-thirds. This was personal and community responsibility in its truest and most genuine sense.

Terrell Pough's death reminds us that personal responsibility by a single individual is not enough, because strong-hearted and com-

mitted citizens who work hard and play by the rules can't wipe out poverty and inequities and gun proliferation and keep our communities safe all by themselves.

Personal responsibility applies to us all — government leaders, community and faith leaders, businesses, parents, and citizens — because we each need to be accountable for identifying what role we can play in the solution and then doing it.

Those of us preparing to celebrate Kwanzaa will recognize this as one of the Seven Principles — ujima, collective work and responsibility — which directs every person in a community to make her brothers' and sisters' problems her own, and then work together to solve them.

Our political leaders need to do more than just preach the gospel of personal responsibility.

They need to stand up to President Bush and the leadership in Congress who are more focused on tax breaks for millionaires than the desperate state of America's poorest children and communities as they try to pass a recklessly irresponsible budget that slashes Medicaid for children, food stamps, foster care and child support for the most vulnerable, as well as state and local law enforcement for neighborhoods that need it most.

Terrell Pough stepped up to the plate. But a lack of personal responsibility from our political leaders contributes to the ongoing violence that caused his death. We must not let his death be in vain.

Marian Wright Edelman is a children's rights advocate and president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.