

Black collegians enjoy positive spring break

By Ron Walters
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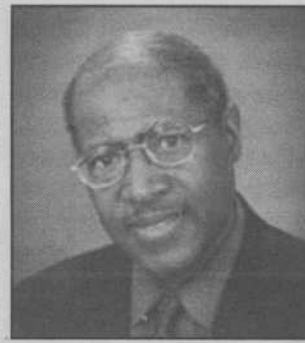
We live during a time when we have doubted the commitment of Black students to help elevate the condition of the less fortunate among us. Some of this ambiguity has been focused on college students whom we believe should know better.

They have access to the written and video legacy of past examples of individuals who have engaged in selfless struggle to advance the race so that successive generations could progress. So, this post-Civil Rights Movement generation has been pummeled for the apparent lack of struggle in their DNA and their permissiveness in allowing aspects of racism to persist by often adopting neoliberal attitudes that allow them to fit in with their White peers. Therefore, to many, their strong response to the Katrina disaster this spring break has been surprising.

The Alternative Spring Break projects began several years ago, when press atten-

tion to thousands of students descending on places like Daytona Beach, Fla., to engage in beer-laden orgies revealed a vacuous set of values. To counter this image and the substance of this period, universities began to permit credit for positive internships, or travel abroad experiences, or other types of productive work projects.

This year, while college students have been better known for trucking to plush hideaways in Latin America, or on sunny beaches in Florida, many have dedicated themselves to working in the American Gulf to make the people damaged by Hurricane Katrina whole. Because of this desire, MTV and United Way sponsored a special project that attracted students at many universities and subsequently more than 35,000 students participated, a welcome response by students of all colors.



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However, when the media began to focus on this event, stories emerged that featured students at predominantly White universities, and as I looked at the numbers of students involved, they ranged from 12 to 78 each from about 50 universities.

But nearly 250 students from Howard University alone became involved, a

number that school officials said quadrupled that of any similar period in the past. Press interview with these students revealed a strong motivation to affect change in the region, by partnering with Habitat for Humanity to rebuild homes, clean houses, remove debris, paint, and mentor students. This was reported to be empowering work, both for the students who participated and for those families and individuals assisted. In this instance, at least one major TV network recognized the uniqueness of this contribution. Last week, ABC's "World News Tonight" named the Howard students its "People of the Week" and devoted a segment to their work in New Orleans.

It should also be noted that students went from other HBCUs, including Morgan State University. Morgan called their project "Katrina On The Ground." HBCUs in the Atlanta area sent not only significant sums of money, but their choirs and other resources

into the area. In addition, many of these institutions (Howard again in the lead) accepted many students from the Gulf region on a temporary basis, in an illustration of family solidarity. It was a positive gesture of leadership of these often-maligned institutions.

In truth, many of the HBCUs stepped up when the religious community has lagged. And although some such as the Progressive National Baptist Church has been involved since Katrina hit, this long-term commitment has not been matched by many of the other religious institutions. This is important because of the long-term spiritual and material needs required by the victims of Katrina, who find themselves thrown out of temporary hotel living quarters, still confused by the whereabouts of relatives, still suffering from illnesses, still unable to return, build and work, and unable to exercise their rights as citizens.

I applaud the students and their institutions that have helped in the Gulf. As one who spent most of his professional career at — okay, I admit it — Howard University, I am aware of the effort such institutions make to inculcate a commitment of service to community in their students. It is marvelous to see that it survives, because it is a strength of their legacy, a reason why they continue to exist, and a formidable reason why they are needed and why they should flourish.

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

Why seek pardon for Rosa Parks if she did nothing?

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) - During the 50th anniversary of the Montgomery bus boycott last year, civil rights leaders called for a pardon of Rosa Parks over her arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a White man. But now, some — including the pastor of the church Parks attended in Montgomery — are coming out against the idea.

With a bill moving through the Alabama Legislature to pardon Parks and perhaps hundreds of others for violating segregation-era laws, they say a pardon implies she did something wrong.

"Why would brave people like this need to get a pardon from anyone? Someone

needs to tell them that we treated you wrong," the Rev. Joseph Rembert, pastor of St. Paul A.M.E. Church, said Monday. "I want my grandson to know what she did."

However, Mary Smith Ware, 69, urged passage of the pardon legislation. The Black woman was arrested and fined \$10 for refusing to give up her seat on a crowded city bus about two months before Parks' arrest.

"I should be pardoned because I feel I didn't have to get up and give my seat to anyone," Ware said.

State Rep. Thad McClammy, a Black Montgomery Democrat and sponsor of the bill, said the pardons will spell out that they are being issued because the

Jim Crow laws were wrong. "I'm in no way trying to compromise history," McClammy said.

The idea of pardoning Parks, who died in October at age 92, and others was raised during the December celebrations in Montgomery honoring the 50th anniversary of her arrest and the start of the Montgomery bus boycott.

Montgomery Mayor Bobby Bright said he would be uncomfortable pardoning Parks and others.

"They came up and resisted unethical, illegal and inhumane laws. I feel horribly inadequate to pardon someone who did nothing wrong," said Bright, who is (See Pardon, Page 15)

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ceedings; but we are sorely lacking in our execution of basic economic strategies for our local communities. Politics is quite important, but first we must support one another, demand reciprocity from those with whom we do business, and work together toward ownership of our communities. Our politics will fall in place when our economic initiatives succeed.

Collective work was a very positive precept of our African ancestors. Today, in some circles, that principle has been promulgated as one reason for the dearth of African-American entrepreneurs. Some say that because we are a communal people, we are reluctant to seek the individual path of entrepreneurship.

This may be partially true, but it does not have to prevent us from using that same spirit of communality to support those of us who are entrepreneurs.

Can you imagine how empowered we would be if we drew upon our basic natural inclination to be a real community? We would

be well on our way to economic, educational, and political parity.

Right now, we don't count. Can you imagine that? We spend \$700 billion, and we don't count. Why? There's no need for the majority to deal with us in any serious manner, especially economically, because we don't act collectively. That's not to say that we should all think alike and act alike and never disagree; it simply means that we should consider our group first, and not be so willing to push one another aside for own individual advancement.

In this country, the only economics is collective economics. Witness all of the mergers, buyouts, alliances, partnerships and no-bid contracts. African-Americans must practice the principle some of us only celebrate one day each year during Kwanzaa: Ujamaa, cooperative economics. If we do that, we will count, we will be empowered, and we will prosper.

James E. Clingman is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American Studies Department.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

KCEP in EOB's hands

Dear Editor:

In response to Mr. Eugene Sloane's letter, "KCEP deserves to be heard," on March 16:

As an elected official, I am often faced with making difficult decisions in the best interest of the Commission District D constituents I represent. Although, at times, some may question my decisions, it is important to recognize that I am driven by the commitment to serve my constituents first. If it will placate Mr. Sloane, I have resided and still reside in District D for 49 years.

My decision to provide \$250,000 in emergency funding to the Economic Opportunity Board (EOB) was based solely on the need to ensure continued services to the thousands of clients served by the EOB each year. Some of these much-needed services provided include nutrition services for the young parents in the W.I.C. program; inpatient substance abuse treatment for adults suffering from addiction; social programs for senior citizens who might otherwise be isolated in their homes and transportation services for elderly and infirm residents.

The loss of these services would leave a wide gap in our community that might take years to replace, if at all. For more than 40 years, EOB has been a staple in Clark County providing services and assistance to the most disenfranchised.

I am saddened at the prospect of losing KCEP 88.1 FM. Like so many others, I have made monetary contributions to the radio station in support of its programming and events and hosted a regularly aired program sponsored by Clark County for many years. I don't know how long Mr. Sloane

has lived in the area or if he does, but I was raised in this area listening to KCEP as a youngster, and throughout my adult years, it has been a source of information and enjoyment. I consider it a staple in our community.

I recognize that many others from the public, private and non-profit sectors, and the community at-large share my sentiments over the potential loss of KCEP. However, there are hard facts that must be understood.

The EOB, owner of KCEP, is faced with a financial crisis. The agency has an outstanding debt of more than \$2 million with no assets outside of the radio station. KCEP has been subsidized for many years by the EOB. A hard business decision has to be made by the board of directors regarding the sale of the radio station in order to keep the EOB operational for its many clients who have come to depend on the agency's services every day. It is not my recommendation, nor is it my decision to make; it is solely the responsibility of the board of directors. Selling the radio station would provide the financial resources needed to ensure these services remain intact. I cannot speak for the board of directors, but I am sure they would welcome funds equal to the appraised value of the station to pull it out of its financial crisis — but there does not appear to be any donors coming forward willing to make such a financial investment in the EOB. The alternative to taking this bold step is to close and dissolve the EOB overall, which would automatically include KCEP.

Yvonne Atkinson Gates
Clark County Commissioner
District D