

NAACP

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social service, that's not what we do. And that's not what we're going to do," Bond said.

"I think it was a gradual realization on both parts that we were not attuned and that I don't know whether he came to us with the attitude, 'I'm going to show those 1960s Negroes where to go and where they need to be.'"

Bond continues, "Haven't you run into people like that who haven't been involved in the struggle for civil rights but think that they know so much more about it than people who have been and who think that, you know, that was good when Dr. King was alive, but, it's another day now?"

Gordon hasn't been shy about his lack of traditional civil rights involvement. In an interview with NNPA shortly after taking the post, the retired Verizon executive, who won wide acclaim for his Black hiring efforts before his retirement nearly four years ago, acknowledged that he had not participated in traditional civil rights marches, but believed there were other ways to achieve justice.

Gordon believes social services such as a housing assistance program through the Bank of America was also necessary for the NAACP as well as increasing its membership and giving an accurate count.

Gordon says he also clashed with the board on his hiring practices.

"I think we need a whole lot of talent in our staff, and I think there are multiple ways to get that talent. You can hire it or you can contract it. I was trying to tap all resources to get more skills at the table. That was not an approach that the board was comfortable with," he said.

Gordon's conciliatory style was ultimately demonstrated last summer when President Bush broke his five-year boycott of the organization, embraced Gordon and spoke at the NAACP's summer conference, where he promised to support the renewal of the Voting Rights Act.

Despite the sudden resignation, Gordon calls his tenure a success.

"We've got over 400,000 members and associates. I'm very excited about that," he said. "We had membership below 300,000 when I started. I think that our profile in Washington in terms of our interface with this administration and all branches of government, I think we have a stronger profile than we've ever had."

Sources said he submitted the resignation formally on Feb. 17, but had agreed to work with the board on an agreeable time to announce his resignation and to leave. But, the day after the NAACP Image Award live television broadcast March 2, Gordon told reporters, catching board members, including Bond, off guard.

"He resigned. We didn't dismiss him. And although the relationship wasn't smooth, we were prepared to carry on with that," Bond said.

Former NAACP Board Chair Myrlie Evers-Williams, who has been inactive over the past year because of knee surgery, says the size of the 64-member board with an elected membership consisting of veteran civil rights leaders and activists has frequently clashed with executive styles.

"The issue of the size of the 64-member board has been a major issue for a very long

time," she said. "You have to know what your goals and purposes are, and you have to be able to agree on that. ...The higher purpose is what is to be served."

Bond is less inclined to blame the board structure for the controversy surrounding Gordon.

"[Former President and CEO] Kweisi Mfume stayed for 10 years, former [Executive Director] Ben Hooks stayed for 15 years. This guy stayed for 19 months. So, where's the problem seem to be?" Bond questioned.

Mfume, a former congressman, who also left the NAACP amidst clashes with Bond, said he would have little to say publicly.

"I was sorry to hear of Bruce's decision to move on, but I respect his integrity of purpose and his belief that this was the best decision for him at this time," Mfume said. "We all want the NAACP to survive and get better. Let's hope that that happens sooner rather than later."

Gordon succeeded Mfume, who later ran an unsuccessful race for a Democratic nomination to the U.S. Senate. Mfume says he's been on a speaking circuit the past six months and is now deciding between several career offers.

Bond says NAACP General Counsel Dennis Hayes will again serve as interim president until a new one is picked. An exit date for Gordon was not decided by NNPA deadline, but, Gordon said, "I'm sure we'll do it quickly."

Mfume dismissed the question when asked if he would reapply for his old job. "It hasn't crossed my mind," he said.

But, it has apparently crossed the minds of others.

"The name has come up, but I don't think so. The question has come up. It's a question of having been there, and we don't want to go back there, and we want to move ahead. We are always thinking that with every step we take, it gets higher and higher and higher," said Bond.

Evers-Williams, who was the chair when Mfume was hired, responded, "I think the question is would he consider?"

Despite the controversy, Bond concedes he wants someone like Gordon, but with more of a civil rights orientation.

"To be fair, I'd like someone with some of Gordon's qualities, a familiarity with the corporate world, a way of doing business that is attentive to the bottom line. These are not always qualities that non-profit CEOs have. And he has them. But generally we want somebody who is rooted in the Civil Rights Movement, who is comfortable around a wide variety of people and who is committed to fighting for the civil rights of his or her people," Bond says.

Among the first people to respond to the Gordon resignation was National Urban League President Marc Morial.

"I was surprised and disappointed to learn about his decision to leave the NAACP," said Morial. "Bruce Gordon is a highly competent and experienced leader whose contributions and voice will be missed."

It's not about who's right or who's wrong, said Gordon. "I think it's more important to simply say that I've got a different view of what will make the organization more effective than the board itself."

N-word on New York City Council agenda

NEW YORK (AP) - A city councilman says he hears it over and over on the streets of New York City: young people casually addressing each other using a racial slur that has a painful history intertwined with slavery.

"You hear it 10 times within two minutes," said Councilman Leroy Comrie.

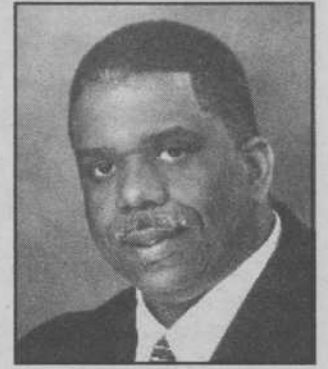
Comrie, last week, urged the council to approve a symbolic resolution calling for New Yorkers to voluntarily stop using the n-word. The effort began weeks ago at the start of Black History Month, and has gradually gained nationwide notice and support.

Comrie and other backers of the non-binding measure say its purpose is to call attention to what they say is a troubling trend among entertainers and youths to try to repackage the n-word as a term of endearment and camaraderie.

Hip-hop artists in particular have been singled out for weaving the term into music and entertainment, which some say waters it down and

"This [the N-Word] was derived solely from hate and anger, and you just can't recreate it."

— Leroy Comrie
New York City Councilman



convinces younger audiences that the word is acceptable.

Some argue that doing so is empowering, and that reclaiming a slur and giving it a new meaning takes away its punch.

Comrie disagrees, saying it is impossible to paper over the n-word's long and hurtful history.

"This was derived solely from hate and anger, and you just can't recreate it," Comrie said.

The word has received increased attention since the incident last year in which actor Michael Richards, who played the nutty Kramer on "Seinfeld," used the word while blowing up at audience

members during a standup routine. Richards later apologized and said that the outburst was motivated by anger, not racism.

After the Richards episode, Black leaders including the Rev. Jesse Jackson and California Rep. Maxine Waters challenged the public and the entertainment industry — including rap artists, actors and movie studios — to stop using the epithet.

Other municipalities are considering measures similar to New York City's, and a Historically Black College and University member school in Alabama recently held a four-day conference to discuss the word.

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