

# CBC offers partial solution on Jena 6 case

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

At least the Congressional Black Caucus is trying, which is more than I can say for our national Black leaders. Last week, 14 members of the CBC sent a letter to Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco requesting that she pardon or commute the sentences of the Jena Six.

In announcing the action, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee said, "In order to restore true justice in this case, I am calling for the Governor of Louisiana, Kathleen Blanco, to pardon Mychal Bell immediately. Mychal Bell has been failed by his school district, the Louisiana judicial system, and the United States Department of Justice, and the fight for justice is not over."

Bell recently made a plea deal with the prosecutor that essentially gives him credit for the 10 months he has already served, paving the way for his imminent release, in exchange for agreeing to testify against his five co-defendants. Bell, the only defendant with a known criminal record, admitted striking the White student in a fight that led to charges being filed against the Jena Six. Now it appears that the most culpable of the six is set to sell out the other five young men.

There are some flaws with the CBC ap-

proach. The primary one is that typically, a person's sentence is not commuted or a person is not pardoned until after the sentence is imposed. In this case, only Mychal Bell has been sentenced so far, and the others are expected to face trial and/or consider a plea deal early next year. While this request from the CBC might be applicable to Bell, at this point it does not help the other five.

Still, I applaud the efforts of Congresswoman Lee and others because at least they are making an effort. But what about all of the others who led the impressive demonstration in Jena, La.? Where are all of the radio "personalities" who broadcast live from Jena — one even exploited the event by having an inappropriate book signing — when the other five young men need them? Sure, they pay lip service to the case, but that's not enough.

Even when the CBC seeks to have an impact in Jena, they are subjected to unfair criticism. Believe me, there are enough reasons to criticize the CBC, but this isn't one of them. I was listening to a talk show on XM



GEORGE E. CURRY

Radio the other night when several callers lambasted the CBC for waiting this long to call for a pardon for the Jena Six. In reality, as I have explained above, they may be calling for those actions too soon. Incidentally, I didn't hear a single criticism of Black leaders who are not doing anything about the plight of the other five young men beyond running their mouths. Not one complaint. Don't get me wrong. I have respect for most of our Black leaders and even defend them when they deserve defending. But this is not one of those instances.

The problem always comes in after we've had a watershed moment. We tend to focus on Jesse Jackson's and Al Sharpton's presidential campaigns, the Million Man March and, more recently, the impressive showing in Jena. All were important and necessary events. The issue is always what happens after the event? Sadly, in most cases, nothing.

Sure, there were some undeniable political victories as a result of Jackson's 1984 campaign. But no lasting, effective political apparatus was left in place. The same goes for the Million Man March. In each case,

there were promises of follow-up but they were as hollow as promises made in Jena.

What's the solution?

I have no solution on the issues of failed leadership except to suggest that we use other Black professional organizations in their particular area of expertise. For example, if we're talking about reforming the criminal justice system, the National Bar Association should be at the forefront of that struggle. If we're talking about reducing or eliminating health disparities, the National Medical Association should be guiding our efforts in that area.

As for Jena, if White leaders there are serious about defusing racial tensions in their community, they should throw out charges against all six teens, as well as any Whites prosecuted on any related charges, and call for community healing. If they refuse to do that, we should return to Jena in even greater numbers than before — with or without Black leaders — to insist on justice. If all that fails and the men are convicted, then we can demand a pardon from the governor.

In the meantime, if Black leaders who helped bring attention to this matter can't join us in this continued effort, it's time to get some new leaders.

George E. Curry is a keynote speaker, moderator and media coach.

# Politicians must pay attention to Black issues

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Down to the last second of this election for president of the United States I will expect that candidates hoping to secure the Black vote must do as they would do with other groups — especially the White majority — and say what they would do in return. Isn't that American politics?

Apparently it is, unless the voters or the candidate running happens to be Black. Then, it's okay to give him a pass on the assumption that he or she will automatically do what is right once elected. But that is how we ended up with Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court. Skin politics just won't work unless the person in the skin has been thoroughly tested.

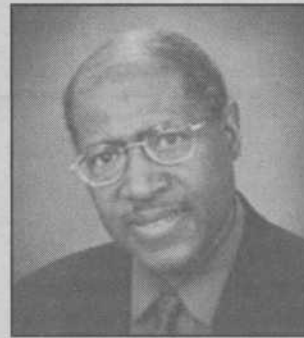
I had a great time recently on the "Bill Moyers Journal" TV show, dialoguing with him about race and its impact on the current election. The accolades about the high quality of that dialogue are still coming in, but there is also a disturbing current of responses, suggesting that it was not polite or politic to

say that the Obama campaign is attempting to neutralize race for fear of alienating his White base.

That observation was not meant to be mean-spirited, but analytically accurate. I hope Obama becomes president of the United States, but it has to mean something tangible as well as symbolic to be liberating.

To come clean, I've not endorsed or supported anyone in the race so as to have some legitimacy to make such statements. However, I should make clear in this space that the observation that the Obama campaign is neutralizing race does not just apply to him, it applies equally to Hillary Clinton. John Edwards seems to be the only one who wants to talk about poverty or to assert that there are "two Americas." And he appears to be competitive the last time I looked.

Think about the current housing crisis, rife with mortgage bleeding that has led to record



RON WALTERS

home foreclosures. I live in Maryland next to Prince George's County, the most affluent Black county in America, where there have been 14,000 home foreclosures. The estimates are that nationally 2.2 million people will face the loss of their homes in the next several years because of the inability to pay their mortgages. This

will hit Blacks the hardest because over half of us who get mortgages get subprime loans, for Latinos it is 42 percent, and for Whites 19 percent.

Black Enterprise magazine featured this problem in one of its recent issues and used the example of a 70-year-old retiree living in Chicago off of a pension of \$950 per month.

In February 2005, she made a loan costing \$832 per month which shot up to \$1,488 by that August. As a result, she is in danger of losing her home, like so many other Blacks who have adjustable rate mortgages that were

pushed toward the Black community. The "pusher" in this case set up a predatory loan because the retiree could barely afford the original rate, but Blacks will do anything to experience the dignity of owning a home.

Why aren't you hearing anything about this? The cost to the Black community could be monumental if there is no intervention by the federal government because homes are the backbone line of credit against which college tuition is paid, autos are purchased, insurance is bought, retirement is secured and health costs are increasingly staved off.

Fortunately, the National Rainbow Coalition is on this case, holding its 11th annual Wall Street Project Conference on January 6-9 right between the Iowa Caucuses on January 3 and the New Hampshire Primary on January 8. Running through the agenda of this meeting is a concern with foreclosures.

It is viewable online at [WallStreetProject2008.org](http://WallStreetProject2008.org).

For example, on Sun., Jan. 6, there will be a State of Black America panel of civil rights leaders, then a State of the Foreclosure Crisis summit. Subsequent panels the following days will look at access to capital, as well as the state of capital markets for Blacks.

Other organizations have taken this seriously: the NAACP through filing a class action suit on some of the big mortgage lenders to stop predatory lending; the National Urban League has lobbied for remedies to the current situation, and Rainbow/PUSH has marched on Wall Street and met with Fed Chairman Bernanke to obtain some redress for borrowers.

Should I not draw attention to the fact that none of the presidential candidates are talking about this and especially how it could hurt the Black community? Sorry, the Creator didn't make me like that.

Ron Walters is a Director of the African American Leadership Institute.

## Clingman

(Continued from Page 8)

now has Black political control, has no Black Town to go along with its Mexican Town, Greek Town, Korea Town, Arab Town, and all the other enclaves in that city of Black folks. Cleage and Coleman Young must be kicking themselves right about now.

As Cleage said, "Black people throughout the country are concerned about whether we will be able to do it in Detroit."

Well, as of right now, the answer is clear, which brings up the leading question: Will Black people ever return to the days of ownership and control of any sections of any cities in this country?

Does politics keep us behind, even though it is supposed to move us ahead? When we

elect Black folks to political offices, are they not supposed to do what they can to empower Black folks, the ones who elected them?

In cities that are majority Black, shouldn't there be some evidence to show that the benefits of political control are accruing to Black constituents?

Are Black politicians so desperate to be validated by other groups that they are willing to give away assets to Whites and others rather than to Black folks? Are Black politicians so easily swayed by the trappings of corporate greed, and are they so accessible to bribes and money schemes that they end up neglecting their own people — even when they are in charge?

Detroit, recently named as "the poorest

city in America," has virtually all Black public officials in charge of Detroit's tremendous economic assets; it also has the highest overall unemployment rate among large cities, at 7.8 percent, and we all know that probably means five times that number for Black people. So what's the problem? Why do those staggering statistics exist? Detroit is a Black city, run by Black folks. Or is it?

Cleage said, "Politics is only one aspect, however. It is also necessary for Blacks to have economic control of their community." Will we ever see that, not only in Detroit, but anywhere?

James Clingman is an educator and author of a Black economic empowerment book series.