

Fashion Week suffers from lack of diversity

NEW YORK (AP) — “What happened to all the Black people on the runway?” asked model Tyson Beckford, who attended several shows at New York Fashion Week. “There are no Blacks on the cats.”

Naomi Campbell put it another way: “Women of color are not a trend. That’s the bottom line.”

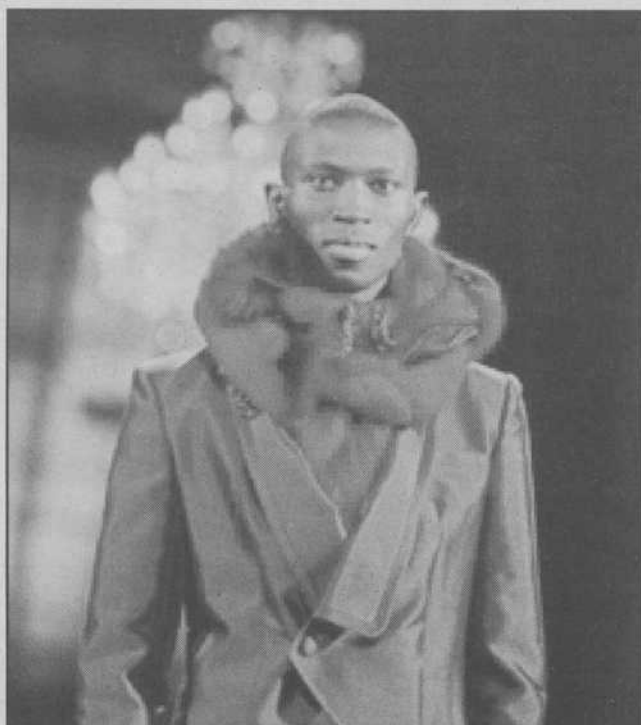
And while Campbell wasn’t invited to the shows this week and didn’t attend, the supermodel may have been on to something. It seems that while the fashion industry was worrying about how skinny models were, it was neglecting another problem: how White they were.

There were drops of color here and there, but with the exception of a couple of shows, the runways were lined with pallid, bony bodies.

“There used to be myself, Naomi Campbell, Veronica Webb, Tyra Banks,” Beckford said. “There used to be a lot of us out there, but today a lot of the designers just aren’t catering to Black people.”

In truth, this Fashion Week looked like about as diverse — or homogenous — as many before it. But if ever there should have been more people of color on the runway, the time was now.

The issue has been the topic of three panel discussions since September held



Rap mogul P. Diddy’s Sean John Fall 2008 collection is modeled during Fashion Week in New York on Friday.

by former model and agent Bethann Hardison. Diane von Furstenberg, president of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, sent a memo to its members encouraging them to create fashion shows “that are truly multicultural.” The media has focused on the issue.

Sean “Diddy” Combs made a statement by using only Black models in his fall Sean John show on recently. And other Black designers, such as Tracy Reese, show diverse runways.

The late 80s and early 90s were seemingly a better time for Black models, including Campbell, Banks, Webb,

Beverly Peele and Karen Alexander. Before then there was Pat Cleveland, Naomi Sims, Iman and Beverly Johnson, the first Black woman to appear on the cover of *Vogue* magazine in 1974.

On *Forbes’* 2007 list of the top fifteen earning models in the industry, only one — Ethiopian beauty Liya Kebede — was Black.

The “in look” right now is White, says Holly Alford, a fashion historian from Virginia Commonwealth University.

“It’s a White European girl look that is being made popular on the magazine cov-

ers,” she said.

There is a lot of finger-pointing over whose action that should be. Some blame the modeling agencies for not sending more ethnic models to casting calls.

Others blame the designers for not hiring ethnic models. Then there are those who put the onus on the casting directors, who work for the designers.

Fashion designer Nick Verreos says he has asked agencies to send models of color only to have them send mostly White women. And Venditti, also director of “Billy The Kid,” says there are so few ethnic girls at the

casting calls that there are not many to choose from. Some of the models of color are eliminated because of fit or walk.

Still, she doesn’t blame the agencies, and she asks why an agency should bring on lots of ethnic models if no one is calling to book them.

Verreos admits that some designers simply won’t use models of color.

“I have heard rumblings that the girls of color take away from the garments; that they are so fierce and have so much of a persona, you notice them first as opposed to noticing the clothing,” he said. “So there are a lot of

designers who would rather have the clothing be noticed and have a pale background. I just don’t think that’s right.”

The entire industry needs to take responsibility, says Neal Hamil, director of Elite Model Management North America, which is sponsoring the next Town Hall meeting.

“There really is not one group or component of the fashion community that is more guilty than others,” he said. “We’re all failing. There was a difference this season ever so slight. The better news is that everyone in the industry can also be part of the solution.”

Your Horoscope Says... Feb. 14 - 20

ARIES

The air can be cleared easily. Admit your need for help. Seek understanding. You’ll help another by seeking help from them. Communication problems will smooth themselves out.

Soul Affirmation: Moving slowly might be the fastest way.

Lucky Numbers: 33, 52, 54

TAURUS

This week should bring an opportunity to further your education, don’t pass it up. Pay special attention to details at work. A friend needs your support. Find joy in giving it.

Soul Affirmation: All things work together for good.

Lucky Numbers: 26, 35, 43

GEMINI

You and your mate should increase your saving for the future this week. Future plans should be spotlighted. A relationship is likely to take a serious turn. Be open to making an unusual purchase.

Soul Affirmation: I can see clearly now the rain is gone. There are no obstacles in my way.

Lucky Numbers: 10, 30, 50

CANCER

You and your partner are on the same wavelength. If you are presented with a contract this week, it’s an ideal week to reach an agreement. Make the important phone call to set things up.

Soul Affirmation: What I’ve been waiting for has been here all along.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 6, 12

LEO

Beware of financial pitfalls that you’ve set for yourself. Strengthen all your relationships by understanding motivations of others. Spend time at home. Enjoy what you already have.

Soul Affirmation: Often it’s not what I say but the way I say it that gets the message across.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 17, 47

VIRGO

Don’t expect to win every battle, especially with your lover. This week winning is losing. Backing down is winning. Shyness produces a bold result. It’s easy to collect that long-standing debt.

Soul Affirmation: I keep money on my mind this week.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 25, 39

LIBRA

Possibilities of hearing good news about home are greatly expanded. Savor the news rather than thinking about other annoyances. Travel is on the horizon. Plan the trip this week.

Soul Affirmation: Jewelry reflects the beauty of my feelings about myself.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 44, 49

SCORPIO

Feather the nest. Stock up on stuff for the long haul. Cement relationships. A friend needs your support. Enjoy giving it. You will receive good news about a pal.

Soul Affirmation: Cheerfully handling what comes at me is the test of who I am.

Lucky Numbers: 13, 22, 31

SAGITTARIUS

Your mate has a sweet surprise. Open up to receive it. Choose your words carefully around a sensitive pal. Listen for good news about a loan or financial matter.

Soul Affirmation: I let others toot my horn this week.

Lucky Numbers: 27, 28, 41

CAPRICORN

Enjoy the great insights you have in the area of career objectives. Take a look at what’s out there! An unanticipated financial matter may arise, find the good in it. You’ve got the juice.

Soul Affirmation: A cheerful soul should be wrapped in a cheerful package.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 23, 29

AQUARIUS

Be cautious and conservative with money. You are extremely witty this week. Allow others to enjoy your good humor. Your leadership skills are very high, and others will follow.

Soul Affirmation: Luck is my best friend this week.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 20, 34

PISCES

This is a good time for you to seek agreement on a plan that involves a relative. Take the time to remind your lover how much you care. Get a little sentimental if you have to. Don’t be too critical of that softer side of your personality.

Soul Affirmation: Self confidence is the key to my success this week.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 9, 19

Author: Obama not electable

“A Bound Man: Why We Are Excited about Obama And Why He Can’t Win”

By Shelby Steele;

Free Press; Hardcover; \$22.00; 158 pages

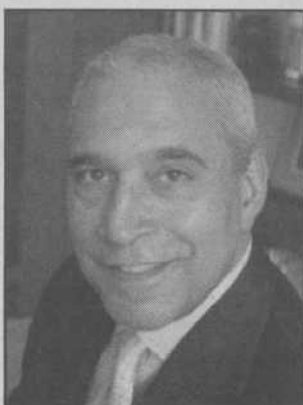
ISBN: 978-1-4165-5917-7

By Kam Williams

Sentinel-Voice

“Louis Armstrong adapted a mask that came out of the [B]lack minstrel tradition... It communicated to [W]hite audiences that Louis Armstrong would entertain them but not presume to be their equal. The relentlessly beaming smile, the handkerchief dabbing away the sweat, the reflexive bowing, the exaggerated humility and graciousness — all this signaled that he would not breach the manners of segregation, the propriety that required him to be both cheerful and less than fully human...”

What is exceptional about Barack Obama is the same



SHELBY STEELE

thing that was exceptional about Louis Armstrong. Neither man discovered a new way for society to racially arrange itself. But both men found a way to capture the goodwill of [W]hites in a way that facilitated their lives and careers.” — Excerpted from pages 61 and 127.

Only last year, I saw a movie in which characters seriously speculated about whether the United States would elect a robot or a Black President first. Regardless of

the answer, the intended message was that the country was nowhere near ready to vote for an African-American.

Nevertheless, Barack Obama has managed to mount a competitive campaign for the Democratic nomination. And, should he succeed in defeating Hillary Clinton in that endeavor, the only question left will be whether he can win in the November General Election.

Already weighing-in with an answer is Professor Shelby Steele, public intellectual, Black conservative and author of such books as “The Content of Our Character and White Guilt.” Steele, like Obama, has a Black father and a White mother, so he presumes to understand Barack’s mindset better than most of us.

It is his contention that the Junior Senator cannot ascend to the presidency because he

(See Bound, Page 7)