

NAACP pick viewed as crucial to survival of group

By Bonnie Winston
Special to Sentinel-Voice
RICHMOND, Va. (NNPA) — Three candidates have emerged as finalists for the national NAACP's top position, the *Free Press* has learned.

But an undercurrent of discontent over the choices of a special NAACP search committee may force the nation's oldest civil rights organization to find an alternative from within its own upper ranks.

According to highly placed sources, the three finalists for the job of president and chief executive officer are:

- Benjamin Todd Jealous, 35, a former executive director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association and now president of the Rosenberg Foundation in California.

- The Rev. Frederick D. Haynes III, 47, a Dallas megachurch leader.

- Alvin Brown, 37, a former White House senior advisor to President Bill Clinton and urban policy director for Sen. Hillary Clinton's campaign.

Contacted at the NAACP's Baltimore headquarters this week, Richard McIntire, a spokesperson for the national organization, would neither confirm nor deny the names.

However, he did say the first opportunity for the

NAACP's 64-member board to take any action would be at its May 16 and 17 meeting in Baltimore.

Leaks have sprung from what was to be a highly guarded process because of the antipathy with which the three finalists are viewed by many insiders.

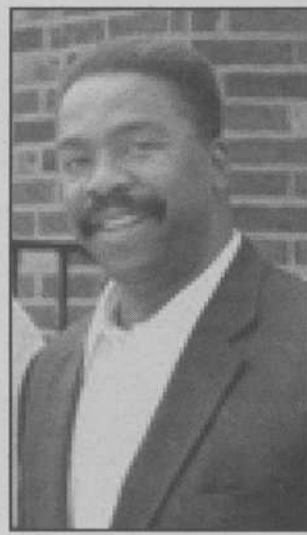
The three are said to be closer to the mold of Bruce S. Gordon, the former Verizon Communications executive who was head of the national organization for just 19 months before resigning unexpectedly in early March 2007.

Gordon, whose leadership style and corporate background put him out of sync with the board, reportedly clashed almost immediately with the very hands-on directors.

Because of his tension-filled tenure, several board members want the NAACP's next leader to be a person rooted in the civil rights struggle, perhaps even an insider.

The name most frequently mentioned is that of the Rev. Nelson B. Rivers, chief of field operations for the national NAACP. The South Carolina native has worked at every level within the organization, from branch president to state and regional director.

Since Gordon's departure, the top leadership position has been filled on an interim



Alvin Brown is among three finalists to lead the NAACP.

basis by Dennis Courtland Hayes, the organization's former general counsel.

Even Salim Khalfani, executive director of the Virginia NAACP, expressed reservations about the three finalists.

"I'm really disappointed by the names that have come back as finalists," he said.

"They might be well respected, but... we need someone who has worked in the movement, is known in the movement," he said.

He called the selection of a new leader "the most important decision" facing NAACP, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary next year.

"This is going to make or break the organization."

Fueling the unfavorable feelings are indications that only the top candidate — and

not all three finalists — will be presented to the board for consideration. That person is reported to be Jealous, a Rhodes Scholar who served as managing editor of the *Jackson Advocate*, Mississippi's oldest Black newspaper. In that capacity, he was a strong civil rights advocate under hostile conditions. He later became executive director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, an organization of more than 200 Black-owned newspapers that includes the *Free Press*.

Jealous left to work with Amnesty International, a highly respected human rights organization, where he led efforts to pass federal laws against prison rape and to build public consensus against racial profiling after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He has been president of the California-based Rosenberg Foundation for three years. The private foundation financially backs advocacy efforts to improve the lives of California's working families and recent immigrants.

McIntire said several board members made it plain at a February meeting that they wanted the search committee to consider "elevating from within."

He did not comment on the possibility of Rev. Rivers' candidacy. He said 200 applicants expressed interest

in the job. The field was narrowed to 75, then to 25.

Despite Khalfani's doubts about the finalists, he said he's optimistic that the search may be re-opened in the face of a backlash from the organization's rank and file. Khalfani said Rev. Rivers would be "an excellent leader" because of his knowledge, history and advocacy within the organization and because he is well known and respected by people across

the country.

Three Virginians serve on the national organization's board. They are attorney James E. Ghee of Farmville, Rovenia Vaughan of Powhatan and Babette Colquitt of Alexandria.

Ghee and Julian Bond, chairman of the national board, did not immediately return phone calls seeking comment.

Bonnie Winston writes for the *Richmond Free Press*.

Judge: Blacks-only talk was bad move

ATLANTA (AP) — A Black judge says he was wrong to evict Whites from his courtroom so he could deliver a stern lecture to Black defendants, but says he meant no harm.

"I wanted to have a fireside chat," Fulton Superior Court Judge Marvin Arrington said Thursday. "And my grandmother said years ago that if you're going to fuss at Black people, you don't need to do it in front of White people."

He added, "I probably made a bad judgment call and I probably won't do it again. It was not ill-intended. My heart was in the right place."

Last Thursday — sentencing day in his courtroom — Arrington asked all White people to leave the room before he lowered the boom on the defendants, telling them that bad behavior in poorer Black neighborhoods drags down Black advancement.

He delivered a similar message at this Thursday's sentencings, only with no race restrictions. TV news crews were on hand because of the controversy generated by Arrington's move last week.

The judge talked about several killings and other violent crimes, including one in which his own brother was robbed while unlocking the door to his home. He said the gunman put a pistol in his brother's mouth.

"We have insanity going on in the Black community," Arrington said. "If we don't say something, the infrastructure of this community is going to collapse. It will be like living in the wild, wild West."

He said he managed to avoid bad choices as a young man because his own mother gave good advice, schoolteachers took an interest in him and he feared his father's retribution. Today, he said, "babies having babies" and parents who don't act like parents have made what were always tough neighborhoods far worse.

Arrington said he won't keep quiet in the future, but he'll be more inclusive.

Zimbabwe

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end, driving at least four cattle ranchers off their land and seizing equipment and livestock, the farmers reported.

Police persuaded the invaders to leave farms in southern Masvingo province, but only one of the farmers returned, the farmers said.

Mugabe, 84, started the often-violence seizure of White-owned farms in 2000 after he suffered his first defeat at the polls over a referendum to entrench his presidential powers. He said the farms would go to poor Blacks. In reality, many of the 5,000 seized farms went to his friends and cronies.

The seizures touched off an economic collapse in the country that used to thrive on exports of food, minerals and tobacco.

Mugabe, who has ruled since his guerrilla army helped overthrow White minority rule in 1980, has seen his popularity battered by the

economic crisis.

A leader of independence war fighters in Masvingo, Isiah Muzenda, said veterans and "patriotic Zimbabweans" will take "strong action against unrepentant White farmers" allegedly preparing the repossess their farms, *The Herald* reported.

The paper also claimed the opposition planned to hire German bankers to run the state central bank, whose hurried printing of money, including a new 50 million Zimbabwe dollar note, has further heated inflation raging beyond 100,000 percent.

Unofficial tallies by independent monitors show Tsvangirai won more votes than Mugabe — but fewer than the 50 percent plus one vote required to avoid a runoff.

The law requires a runoff within 21 days of the initial election, but diplomats in Harare and at the United Nations say Mugabe may order a 90-day delay to give secu-

rity forces time to clamp down.

Official results for parliamentary elections held alongside the presidential race showed Mugabe's ZANU-PF losing its majority in the 210-seat parliament for the first time in the country's history. Final results for the 60 elected seats in the senate gave the ruling party and the opposition 30 seats each.

The government banned most foreign journalists from covering the elections and barred Western election observers. Several foreign jour-

nalists, including Barry Bearak of the *New York Times*, remained in custody Monday after being charged with "illegally observing an election without official accreditation," according to their lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa. She said the offense carried a maximum penalty of a fine, two years in prison, or both. Mtetwa said three judges declined Monday to hear her urgent application for the release of the journalists, who are being held at Harare's central police station. She was at the court trying to find a willing judge.

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