

# New ideas needed to (re)invigorate NAACP

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The votes are in and now it's time to rally behind the candidate. No, I am not talking about presidential politics. I am referring to the NAACP's decision to hire 35-year-old Benjamin Jealous as its next president.

Prior to the selection, I made no secret of my belief that another finalist, Rev. Frederick D. Haynes III of Dallas, would have made a better and more dynamic leader. I still feel that way. But now that the NAACP board has decided otherwise, this is no time to walk away from our oldest civil rights organization.

Supporting the NAACP does not mean it should be above criticism, however. The idea of having an up-or-down vote on a single candidate for president — the one favored all along by Board Chair Julian Bond — rather than allowing the board to vote on all three finalists was an exercise in raw political power, not fairness. And Julian Bond's decision to lobby for having tarnished primary ballots counted in Michigan and Florida represents the first time in my memory that he has been on the wrong side of a major public policy issue.

Still, despite the asinine talk about our living in a post-civil rights or post-racial society, our major civil rights organizations are needed in this era of Jim Crow, Esquire. The

National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium reports that although White men make up only 48 percent of the college-educated workforce, they hold 85 percent of the tenured college faculty positions, 86 percent of law firm partnerships, more than 90 percent of the top jobs in the news media, and 96 percent of CEO positions.

Obviously, there is still plenty of work to do. Although NAACP insiders didn't like it at the time, immediate past president Bruce Gordon did the association a favor two years ago when he revealed that contrary to the claim that the NAACP has 500,000 members — a number the group has been using since 1946, according to the Baltimore Sun — the actual figure is less than 300,000. The NAACP likes to claim their membership numbers are roughly twice that, but they arrive at that bogus conclusion by counting people that have interacted with the NAACP electronically.

As I wrote at the time of the Gordon disclosure, the low figure is a reflection on us, not the NAACP. With a Black population of 38 million, there's no excuse for not having more than 1 million dues-paying members.



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Of course, this lack of support is not limited to the NAACP. We fail to fully support the Black institutions that support us, including the Black Press.

The Census Bureau reports that there are more than 2 million Blacks living in New York City. Yet, according to a report last year by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, there were only 13,175 paid subscribers to the *Amsterdam News* in 2006. And that represented a decline of almost 30 percent over two years.

If the NAACP is going to grow its membership under Jealous, it will need to move away from some of the antics that grab headlines, but accomplish little else. During last year's national convention in Detroit, for example, thousands of delegates participated in a mock funeral organized by the local chapter to bury the n-word. The next time there is a funeral to bury anything, we should first make sure it is dead. And the n-word is far from dead.

According to a recent study by the Parents Television Council titled, "The Rap on Rap," the dreaded n-word had to be bleeped more than any other expletive from videos studied on BET and MTV. In Greenwood, Miss., a White member of the city council

sent out an e-mail recently referring to a highly respected Black leader as an "ole" n-word. Not only is the n-word not dead, it is not even injured.

If there is an area that Jealous may be able to make an immediate improvement in, it will be forming coalitions with other Black professional organizations. He has the contacts and inclination to bring about needed improvement in that area.

The days of a civil rights organization being everything to everybody — if there was ever such a day — is over. It's time to turn to the experts in our community instead of pretending that civil rights groups have all of the answers.

There are some things the NAACP does better than any other organization. Its ACT-SO program, highlighting academic achievement, is exceptional. And the NAACP Civil Rights Report Card is an indispensable research tool for holding elected leaders accountable. Creating substantive and relevant programs is the key to bringing in new members, not resorting to gimmicks.

Ben Jealous is young, smart and committed. While he was not my first choice for the job, I'm hoping that he proves me wrong.

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## Black leadership: Trained, willing and able to serve

By Gary L. Flowers  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The continuum of leadership in Black America has been rooted in competence, apprenticeship, vision, and timing. This week's announcement by the National Association for the Advancement Colored People of Ben Jealous as its new president is no different. From Nubia to now, leadership in the Black community does not emanate by accident. A study of Ancient Egypt reveals that pharaohs, priests and generals were well prepared to lead. The Biblical account of Moses' life began with the timing of being pulled from a river and placed in a palace; the vision of "The Promised Land" for his people; the apprenticeship and years of study as a priest in the Mystery System of Ancient Egypt; and the competence and faith to lead people. Modern African leaders, such as Kwame

Nkrumah (Sacred Theology), Jomo Kenyatta (Medicine), and Nelson Mandela (Law) were professionally well-trained in addition to their life of social activism and national leadership. Throughout the continuum of Black leadership, whether Joshua, King Tut, or a young 26-year-old Ph.D. named Martin Luther King Jr., age has never been a litmus test for leadership.

Within the Black community, and the world at-large, exists a liberal sprinkling of old fools and young wise men and women. One hundred years after W.E.B. DuBois and Ida B. Well-Barnett moved the Niagara Movement into the NAACP, the ascendancy of a 35-year old journalist/activist/philanthropist to the highest office should be applauded. While young leaders do not replace older ones, but complement the leadership continuum, it is timely that Ben Jealous brings a

fresh vision to the NAACP. Born in California, and trained at Columbia University and Oxford University, his academic preparation is strong. Serving as the executive director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association has afforded Jealous with a pulse of the people's priorities.

While naysayers within and without the Black community decry the efficacy and effectiveness of Black leadership, Ben Jealous and the phalanx of "forty- and thirty-something-year olds" in leadership positions is a statement to the future of Black leadership. Beginning with those reported to be finalist of the NAACP top job of Reverend Frederick Haynes (47) and Alvin Brown (37). Within the Black Leadership Forum are: Marc

Morial (48) of the National Urban League; Hazel Trice Edney of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (47); Nicole Lee of TransAfrica (32); Melanie Campbell of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (41); Reverend Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus (37); John Hope Bryant of Operation Hope (40); and Jennifer Jones (40) of the National Pan-Hellenic Association. The legacy of leadership in the Black community is institutional and individual. As a new cadre of committed young, gifted and Black men and women compliment existing leaders in national organizations, leadership begins in individuals, trained and prepared to lead.

Gary Flowers is executive director and CEO of the Black Leadership Forum.

## Clingman

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"by any means necessary." The answers point to the fact that our backs are still exposed — politically, socially and economically — and we are still taking lashes from an overseer who is constantly telling us our name is "Toby" not Kunta Kinte.

We have been and continue to be fodder for accusations and innuendo that depicts us as "hating" America, even though we fought and gave our lives to maintain its status in the world. After all we have done for this country, we still can't even get an honorable mention from folks running for President.

Edwards' comments about the disparity that exists between Blacks and Whites were, indeed, a step in the right direction. Of course, we need more than mere rhetoric, but his relatively bold words do set the stage for forward movement.

I don't know about you, but I am so tired of being treated like a non-people, and even

more than that, I am tired of us allowing others to treat us that way.

Albert Einstein said, "The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it." What are we going to do about all of the adverse issues we face in this country?

While I appreciate John Edwards pointing out that gross economic disparity (Who knows? Maybe he will be Obama's vice-president), I also know the answer to the question: "Who's got our back?" The government of this nation has shown us since Thaddeus Stevens' plea for reparations that it does not have our back. Thus, it is way past time not only for us to admit that, but also for us to answer loudly and clearly, "We've got our own back!"

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

## Michelle

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Michelle Obama made while campaigning in Wisconsin last February, when she said: "For the first time in my adult life, I am really proud of my country."

The four-minute video replayed the remark six times, interspersing it with commentary by Tennesseans on why they are proud of America. In a news release that included a link to the video, Tennessee's GOP said "the Tennessee Republican Party has always been proud of America." It urged radio stations to play "patriotic music" during Michelle Obama's visit to Nashville last Thursday.

Michelle Obama later clarified the remark, saying she meant she was proud of how Americans were engaging in the political process and that she had always been proud of her country.

"Whoever is in charge of the Tennessee GOP needs to think long and hard about the kind of campaign they want to

run, and I think that's true for everybody, Democrat or Republican," Obama said in the ABC interview, adding: "These folks should lay off my wife."

Obama said his wife "loves this country. For them to try to distort or to play snippets of her remarks in ways that are unflattering to her is, I think, just low class. I think that most of the American people would think that as well."

Tennessee's Republican Party was roundly criticized in March, including by likely presidential nominee John McCain, for a news release that used Barack Obama's middle name — Hussein — and showed a photo of him wearing what it said was "Muslim attire."

The release ultimately was removed from the party's website at the urging of the state's two Republican senators and Republican National Committee Chairman Mike Duncan, who said he "rejects these kinds of campaign tactics."