

OUR VIEW

Back in Step?

"Excitement continues to grow as the NAACP heads toward its 99th Annual Convention, being held July 12-17 in Cincinnati, just months ahead of its centennial celebration. Themed 'Power, Justice, Freedom, Vote,' this year's annual gathering of more than 8,000 NAACP members, delegates and visitors will be held at the Duke Energy Center and kicks off a series of events leading up to the association's centennial Feb. 12, 2009." So reads a press release on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's website (www.naacp.org).

The next part of the release quotes NAACP national board of directors vice chair and convention planning committee chair Roslyn Brock: "This year's convention is a culmination and celebration of all the NAACP represents. As we approach the next century of social justice activism, we remain empowered and committed to a progressive agenda that demands fairness and prosperity for all. The convention's offerings underscore the point that we all must be engaged in that effort and that the NAACP has a place for everyone and every lifestyle."

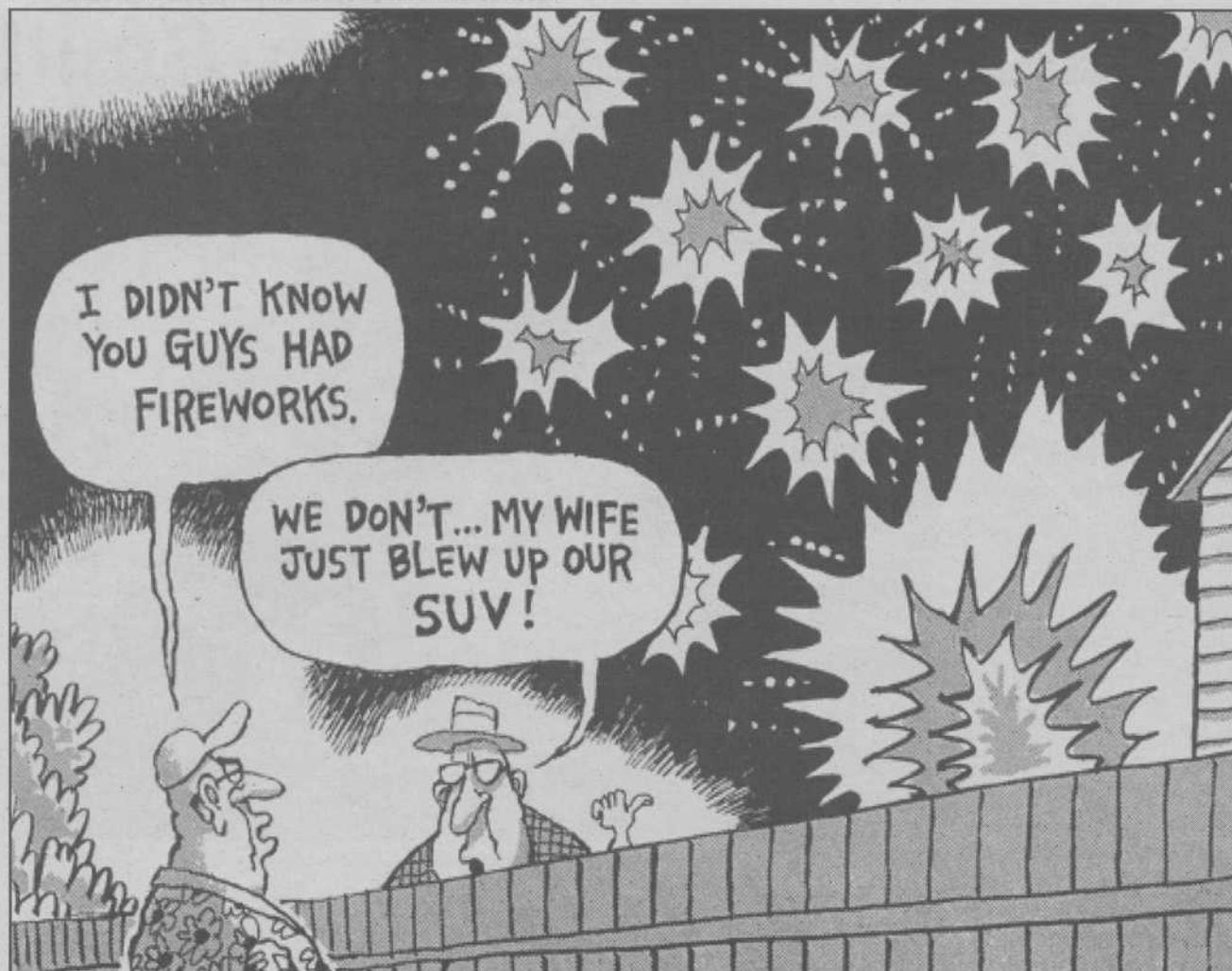
We only hope that Brock's words are prescient. A revived, rejuvenated NAACP is what America in general, and Black America in particular, needs right now in these trying times. We need a strong NAACP because America is facing challenges it hasn't seen in generations. The nation's foreclosure crisis has literally turned the American dream of home-ownership into a nightmare for multitudes. Predatory lending practices have pushed tens of thousands into foreclosure and put throngs more in danger of losing their homes. The NAACP signed on as an early support of Democratic Connecticut Sen. Christopher Dodd's Homeownership Preservation and Protection Act of 2007. The bill prohibits brokers from steering prime borrowers to more expensive subprime loans; requires real analyses of borrowers' ability to repay loans and prevents loan prepayment penalties; allows state attorneys general to enforce the provisions of the law, and does not preempt state law; and permits borrowers to go directly to the current mortgage holder for a cure.

These are the types of issues the NAACP needs to be out front on. But is mustn't stop there. For the NAACP to recapture its vaunted status as America's oldest and most respected civil rights organization, it will have to reverse a membership slide that sheared nearly 100,000 people from the rolls between 1990 and 2004. And it must find a way to generate the kinds of revenue that will permit it to be an active participant and, if need be, litigant, in public policy affairs. One way to rekindle old spirits and set new members afire is tackling pertinent issues of the day.

Recapturing the spirit that enabled it to champion the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the 1968 Fair Housing Act, the 1991 Civil Rights Restoration Act and the 2002 Help America Vote Act is but one of the things the NAACP Washington Bureau, which serves as the group's federal legislative liaison and national public policy office, must do. It must make itself a force on issues like education, employment, fair wages, affordable housing, job discrimination, ex-felon repatriation, national trade and foreign policy. It must be our advocate on Capitol Hill and weigh in on offices that may not be on our radar but are no less important.

At the local level, the NAACP has to focus on empowering chapters to be arbiters of change and champions of justice in their communities. That starts with identifying the community's needs and setting action plans on how to achieve them. Modern-day activism calls for reason and discipline. A good local example is the coalition of entities that worked together to highlight the casino industry's poor record on managerial diversity and minority business procurement. But there are so many other civil rights issues the NAACP could focus on: disinvestment in blighted areas in Clark County, educational inequality, restoring voting rights for ex-felons, and racism in the criminal justice system.

The NAACP must re-establish its reputation as an organization that can be counted on. It has to, once again, take principled stands, and its leaders must be willing to embrace the visionary style of its leaders of yore.



Obama's diss of Blacks risky

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

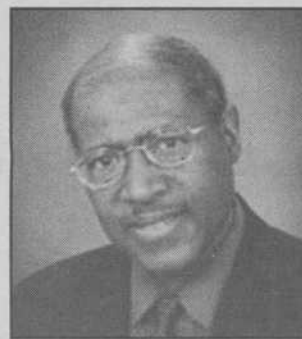
Just back from the RainbowPush convention in Chicago sponsored by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., I was struck by the fact that neither Barack nor Michelle Obama showed up and they live virtually right down the street.

The symbol of Obama's absence was made even more vivid to me because he was out making nice with Hillary Clinton to knit together a unified campaign in the fall.

I understand that, but I also understand that he could have shown up, when Governor Bill Richardson, who lives in New Mexico, not only showed up, but gave a rousing speech crediting the civil rights movement for much of the political success of the Hispanic community and his own.

I know, I know, it is common knowledge now that Barack Obama has to distance himself from Black radicals, from his church, and much of his community in order to make White voters comfortable enough with him to trust him and then give him their votes. And he will probably show at the NAACP Convention. But the troubling trend which finds him absent from other venues that are the substance of Black life looks like he is taking the Black community for granted because of their thirst for his victory.

I was not too put out when



RON WALTERS

Obama did not show up at the State of Black America, because Michelle Obama was offered to Tavis Smiley and Obama was campaigning to win a touch primary in Indiana.

Jackson, however, not only was material in Barack Obama's rise to the State Senate and the U. S. senate, he represents to most people the living legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

That is important because the Civil Rights movement is implicated in Obama's victories, since he won 99 pledged Delegates in nine Southern states during the primary elections. This performance was in states where Blacks constituted one-third or more of the Democratic party base, states where the Voting Rights Act worked to empower Black voters to make a difference.

Without those 99 delegates, Hillary Clinton would have won the pledged delegate race and the popular vote and most surely would have won the nomination.

The question this raises is

whether the sophistication of Black voters in this case will eventually cost them. Blacks have a long history of voting for Whites when the potential returns were based on hope.

If we support a Black candidate for president of the United States, I think that it is fair to ask whether we will have more or less access — at least as much access as we did to Bill Clinton — and whether he will deliver the goods for our community.

My concern here is that theory of Black politics should be to move our community from just hoping their political participation will lead to resources, to exercising tough leverage over politicians to negotiate potential returns to our community in exchange for our vote.

In fact, one of the lessons of Rev. Jackson's two previous presidential campaigns is that "Hope and Trust poli-

tics" is not as effective as the ability to trade votes for future support. The irony is, however, that when a Black person runs for high profile office, our leverage often disappears because we are asked to trust that the person will deliver based on their ties to the Black community.

The Black community didn't have to play the politics of leverage with Rev. Jackson because he had proved his fidelity to their needs through his history, and in his presidential campaigns he spoke forcefully to their issues. I know, I know, he didn't win.

But I am driven to ask what the traditional notion of "winning" is worth under circumstances where the level of trust is not as high, because the message is absent and the candidate is absent. In other words, how much can the Black community

(See Walters, Page 9)

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