

West: World hanging in balance

By Sean Yoes
Special to Sentinel-Voice
(NNPA) — When Cornel West gave us his first book, *Race Matters*, the world in 1993 was a much different place than it is today.

"We are in a new day. I couldn't have said that 15 years ago with *Race Matters* because I wrote *Race Matters* in the middle of the bleak ages, political Ice Age," West said.

But with the transcendent election of President-elect Barack Obama, it is clearly a new day for America and the world. And with this new day, West has given us a new book, *Hope on a Tightrope: Words & Wisdom*.

"I think it's a metaphor for our lives, for our nation and for the world that is hanging in the balance," said West about his new offering, a collection of speech excerpts, quotations, letters, philosophy and photos.

"What it really means is trying to muster the courage to think critically about ourselves and the world, muster the courage to empathize with, especially, the most vulnerable and the poor and the disadvantaged," said West.

The scholar, philosopher

and critic is currently serving as the Class of 1943 university professor at Princeton where he teaches in the Center for African-American Studies and in the Department of Religion.

"We now just left the age of Ronald Reagan and the era of conservatism. We brought to a close the epic of the Southern strategy and that had to do with the economics of greed, the culture of indifference to the poor, the politics of scare tactics, scapegoating and fear."

West added, "So in the face of greed, we're talking about fairness and justice. In the face of indifference, we're talking about compassion, love and service. And in the face of fear, we're talking about hope — how do you generate some sense of possibility — people believing that they actually can make a difference in the world."

But even West, one of the most important thinkers and philosophers of a generation, is still grappling mightily with the "meaning" of President Barack Obama.

"I think it's beyond measure. I don't even really think we have a standard yet," he said. "I think about myself

growing up. The idea of a Black man in the White House was like the idea of a snowball in hell. So it's just beyond measure in terms of the psychic impact. This is where symbols make a difference — symbols matter — in terms of shaping the hearts and minds and souls especially of our precious young people," added West, a child of the segregated South who was born in Tulsa, Okla.

"And this is true even for White and Brown and Red and Yellow kids as well. So that their sense of possibility — the fact that they no longer have to look primarily to athletes and entertainers — but now will look to a Black president who's committed to public interest and common good. That's just a beautiful thing; that's a magnificent thing."

But even as the world continues to revel in the Obama breakthrough, there has been an insidious uptick in racist incidents across the U.S. since his election.

There have been cross burnings, church burnings, Black figures hung in effigy, racial epithets scrawled on homes and cars and even schoolchildren chanting, "Assassinate Obama."

"I think there is going to be a White backlash. Right now it's on the down low but it will be manifest in a number of different ways because it's still America," West observed. "I think the White brothers and sisters are not post-racial, just less racist than they used to be and that they voted for a Black man based on qualification, not pigmentation. That's a beautiful thing but it doesn't mean racism doesn't exist."

Yet, as West's first book *Race Matters* helped foster a new dialogue on race in America, Obama's candidacy and subsequent election is shifting the U.S. race paradigm more forcefully.

"He (Obama) completely re-cast and transgressed the stereotypical categories that they're used to deploying. The important thing is he triumphed though," West declared. "The question now is for us to continue to celebrate the symbolic breakthrough, but we also have to have substance on the ground. And all we need do is go into the prison industrial complex and see overt racism."

He adds, "But certainly with a Black man in the White House that makes things much more complicated because it means on the one hand that the White voters are less racist and, therefore, they were willing to elect a Black man who is in control of the Army, the Navy, police — everything."

West added, "On the other hand, of course, Brother Obama has to put in place a team that is as committed to justice as he is. And this is very important."

And although West is an Obama supporter, he is dubious of the president-elect's White House transition machinations thus far.

"I want to give my dear brother time to get his project off the ground. At this moment I don't really follow and don't fully understand what's going on," West said.

"You start with Rahm Emanuel who's got all kinds of problems... that's the first choice? Then talk about Larry Summers (with whom West feuded during their days at Harvard) as a possible secretary of the treasury — recycling all of these old Clintonite, neo-liberal, deregulating folk. And then here comes Hillary for secretary of state. I'm unsure — I want to give him time — but I just don't follow it."

West clearly relishes do-
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Bits 'n' Pieces

Vegas judge drops charges against 'Suge' Knight

(AP) — A Las Vegas judge has dismissed drug and battery charges without prejudice against hip-hop mogul Marion "Suge" Knight. The prosecution had "witness problems. Knight had been charged with two counts of felony drug possession and one count of misdemeanor battery. Police say they had seen the founder of Death Row Records beating a woman while brandishing a knife near the Las Vegas Strip in August. The district attorney's office has filed a notice with the court indicating they were likely to seek a grand jury indictment.



"Suge" Knight

Sean Combs pushes campaign to be cast as first Black James Bond

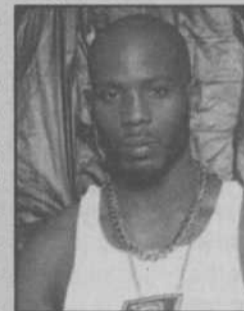


Sean "Diddy" Combs

(TMS) Although it was initially thought to just be idle talk by a rapper who was full of himself, hip-hop music mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs is apparently serious about his efforts to convince film makers to cast him as the first Black James Bond. It was widely reported last week that he has spent \$75,000 on an audition tape presented to the owners of the agent 007 franchise. The tape grew out of a promo for his new "I Am King" fragrance. Combs issued a statement saying, "There is a Black president, and it's time for there to be a Black Bond." Further, there does appear to be interest in a movie featuring a Black Bond. Britain's *Daily Mirror* is reporting Combs faces competition from Oscar-winner Jaime Foxx and R&B song master Akon for the role.

DMX a no-show again, warrant issued, again

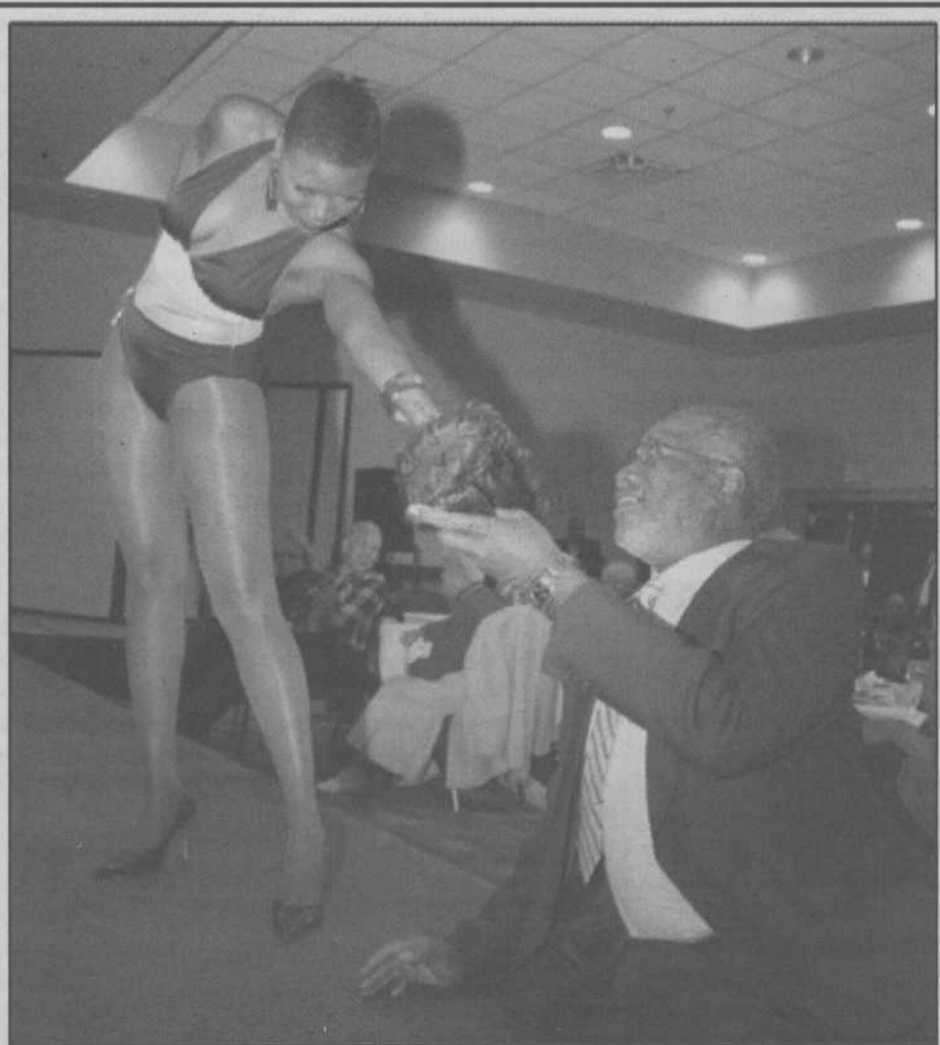
(AP) — A judge in Phoenix has issued a bench warrant for the arrest of rapper DMX after he failed to show up in court Friday morning. It was the second time DMX, whose real name is Earl Simmons, has missed an appearance in Maricopa County Superior Court. The 37-year-old is facing charges of drug possession, identity theft and animal cruelty stemming from three felony arrests. Judge Michael Kemp has now raised DMX's bond to \$120,000 cash. His attorney, Charles Kolzelka, says the hip-hop performer is at an undisclosed rehab facility. DMX was extradited from Miami in Sept. after pleading guilty to drug charges there.



DMX

Tyler Perry wins suit over copyright infringement

Donna West who accused actor-screenwriter Tyler Perry of stealing material from her play for his movie "Diary of a Mad Black Woman" lost her federal lawsuit against the entertainer. Jurors found that she did not present evidence that supported her claim of copyright infringement. The lawsuit argued that Perry lifted material from her "Fantasy of a Black Woman." The play was performed in 1991 in Dallas and West contended Perry could have gained access to the script in 1998 when he presented his plays at the Dallas Black Academy of Arts and Letters. Perry, who testified during the trial, insisted that his screenplay is an original work. His work on the film gained him several awards and nominations. Attorneys for West plan to seek a new trial. Aside from Perry, West sued the actor's company, Tyler Perry Inc., because it sells the movie online and by mail. West also filed suit against Lions Gate Entertainment, Inc., which funded and distributed the film.



FASHION FORWARD

Sentinel-Voice photos by Marty Frierson

One of the *Vogue-Esquire* models of the *Sepia Fashion Revue* hams it up on Saturday with an audience member during her runway strut. This year's event was sponsored by *The Links, Incorporated-Las Vegas Chapter* and was held at the *MGM MIRAGE Culinary Training Academy Events Center*. All of the proceeds from the show went to the organizations scholarship fund.