

Ellis Media Report Politicizing the Media Underclass

By Dwight M. Ellis

What magic is going to propel thousands of blacks and other minorities into greater participation in the growing \$300 billion telecommunications industry? The answers are difficult and illusive, but answers and actions are crucial. In the words of Rep. Tim Wirth, chairman of the U.S. House Telecommunications subcommittee: "At stake is nothing less than the control of information in a democratic society." He goes on to say that, "In the economy of the 1980's, more than half of our gross national product is based on the development, storage, transfer and use of information."

There are a lot of communications deals being made out there netting hundreds of multimillionaires whose business will change the face and direction of society as we know it, but fewer than ten blacks or Hispanics are players. Today, while minorities join millions of other Americans in the quest for economic survival, a somewhat privileged group of media entrepreneurs and their supporters are mastering and expanding their influence in areas many regard as nice-to-have news information, entertainment and leisure fare. The result is the maintenance of a media underclass of blacks and other minorities — millions who consume the products of communications without representative control.

History and current experiences have shown minorities in this country that it takes more than talent and money to make it in any American business or industry. If you have doubts, ask yourself why the second largest industry in Washington, D.C. is the trade association business — special interest groups established to influence particular regulatory agencies and national legislation. Such trade associations as the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the National Cable Television Association (NCTA), and the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) are

strong, influential groups existing to maximize the business interests of their members.

Only two minority communications groups have the expertise and presence to lobby for minority interests on the political scene? The National Black Media Coalition (NBMC) and the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters (NABOB), respectively, led by Pluria Marshall and Pierre Sutton, president of Inner City Broadcasting (e.g. WBLN in N.Y.). Hispanic organizations such as the National Association of Spanish Radio Broadcasters is just beginning to build in this area. Other minority groups that operate more in the realm of sensitizing and striving for greater parity in the communications business sections are: the National Spanish Broadcasters Association (affiliated with Spanish International Network); World Institute for Black Communications (sponsor of the CEBA awards in advertising); and the Black Owned Communications Alliance (concentrating on more advertising for Black publications and newspapers).

Aside from one minority legislator on the U.S. House of Representatives telecommunications subcommittee (Rep. Cardiss Collins, D-Ill) and one minority on the Federal Communications Commission (Commissioner Henry Rivera), minorities lack sufficient numbers for productive clout in the national legislative and regulatory arenas. There's a

big problem here. Blacks and other minorities just don't have the political presence and clout to sustain and expand the gains they're making. And where we have it, we're not using it!

Exceptions like Percy Sutton, former borough president of N.Y.'s Manhattan and chairman of Inner City, and Eugene Jackson board member of the NAB and president of the National Black Network carry enormous burdens of building their business and making way for others to follow. But broader efforts are needed and coming.

There is evidence that certain black leaders are applying hard strategies of negotiation and legislation. Examples are Rev. Jesse Jackson's recent confrontation with Cable News Network's Ted Turner and California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown's statements before an impressive group of minority communications professionals during a telecommunications conference May 6 at the University of Southern California.

Joining Assemblywoman Gwen Moore, chair of the Cable TV subcommittee and convenor of the conference, Brown ignited a political spark that should be replicated by every black and Hispanic state legislative caucus throughout America. In his remarks, Brown alluded to the losses in participation that blacks have experienced over the past decades in telecommunications and film. Never-

theless, he pledged political action in California to preclude this from happening in cable and the new technologies.

"We still have an opportunity from a state level, as well as a local level, to have some influence in shaping the process by which it will come about. All we need to do is look at it from its political perspective. If we legislate right, you will be a part of that system in every respect."

This is not just political rhetoric. Brown and Moore are serious. Political action in telecommunications for blacks is a growing reality. Plans are being made to invite Brown to address a select group of broadcast executives at the NAB during the week of the Congressional Black Caucus weekend.

A recent meeting was held Washington, D.C. with representatives of two major communications trade associations, NABOB and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) to strategize on how black state representatives can be better educated on communications issues and held accountable. Also, a special committee of black communications professionals are meeting with Rep. Cardiss Collins to advise her and Rep. Bill Clay (co-chair of the Caucus' Communications Braintrust) in structuring a productive legislative session for the September 17 meeting.

Maybe we're finding some of the magic we need to do the job at hand. Assembly speaker Willie Brown summed up the crisis simply when he stated:

"As a practical matter, how do you shop for chitlings using an Irishman on one end and a Jew on the other to make the transaction to send to a black household. You will absolutely have to have brothers and sisters because somebody will say chitlins, somebody will say Kansas City Rinkles, somebody will say something else, and people won't know what they're talking about."

Cigarette Tax

Legislation pending before Congress that would double the federal excise tax on cigarettes would adversely affect many readers of your publication should it become law.

Under the provision of a bill designed to raise \$21.2 billion in new taxes, the federal excise tax on cigarettes would increase by 100 per cent — from 8 cents to 16 cents per pack.

A doubling of the excise tax on cigarettes is discriminatory because it would force 55 million Americans who choose to enjoy tobacco products to bear a larger tax burden to help solve a federal budget deficit they did not create.

At a time when low and middle income consumers are already being asked to bear the brunt of cutbacks in many government programs, this tax proposal provides them with an additional burden. The proposed legislation would fall heaviest on poor and black Americans. For this is clearly a tax which would force low and middle income smokers to pay a greater percentage of their income in taxes than those who are more affluent.

On the state and local level, millions of Americans in recent years have said "enough" government officials when new taxes have been proposed. We feel that this proposal to double the federal excise tax on cigarettes should be the point at which we say "enough" to our representatives in Washington.

—Marshall B. Bass
 Vice President
 R.J. Reynolds Industries, Inc.

Thanks To Citizens

On Monday, July 19, 1982, I, Lieutenant C.W. Warren was transferred as Commander of the Vice/Narcotics Division. Captain C.W. Clayton will assume my duties.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many citizens throughout the Durham community and local law enforcement officers in supporting our efforts in waging the war on drug abuse.

I have been impressed with the criminal reputation of arrested drug dealers made by division investigators during several undercover campaigns. There were cases where the vice officers had to place their own safety in jeopardy in order to make

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Letters to the Editor:

an arrest. Their professionalism and devotion have gone beyond the call of duty in serving the citizens of the Durham community. I was not surprised at all when the City Council on October 13, 1980, gave the investigators recognition in the form of a resolution.

Special thanks to Keith Upchurch, writer, *Durham Sun*, Mark Andrews, writer, *Durham Morning Herald* and Hayes Thompson, writer, *The Carolina Times* in presenting timely articles on the dangerous drugs found in the Durham Community. Their articles helped our Drug Abuse Coalition to give valuable information to parents on juvenile involvement with drugs and advising citizens how they could become involved in assisting our division.

Illegal drug traffic is now the third largest industry in America with an annual income totaling

\$64 billion. The heart of this business is the illegal importation of clandestine drugs and the diversion of domestically manufactured substances.

Federal, State and local agencies have combined their forces in an effort to halt the spread of this overpowering problem. A significant increase in property crimes can be directly or indirectly related to drug abuse.

It was realized that the drug problem could not be combated from the standpoint of law enforcement alone. A more innovative approach was needed which would encompass all available assets which were operating in the City of Durham. The Durham Coalition Against Drug Abuse was born. The combined efforts of the Durham Public Safety Department, Durham Housing Authority, Durham District Attorney's office, and the Drug Counseling and Evaluation Services gave us that multi-faceted

approach to deal with the drug problem. The success of this program showed that a need existed within the City of Durham for a drug awareness and education program. With the cooperation of all agencies, the community is able to see the full scope of the drug problem that now exists. Many of the myths and realities of the drug world were discussed with a focus on how illegal drug traffic affects the City of Durham.

It is apparent that the illegal drug problem has not been conquered; however, there appears to be "light at the end of the tunnel." Approximately three years ago the drug abuse problem within our community was in epidemic proportion. The programs and procedures initiated by the Durham Coalition Against Drug Abuse appears to be the formula needed to counteract this problem. A fringe benefit of the Coalition has been the solving of a wide spectrum of problems that encompasses more than just drug abuse. We can all be proud of the spirit exemplified by the Coalition and citizens in the exchange of ideas and resources in such an innovative approach.

—Lt. C.W. Warren

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