

FORUM

Magic Johnson Endorses Hope

Mr. Earvin "Magic" Johnson - million dollar smile and all - recently returned to the NBA. Can he still play? Will fans fill the stands to see him do his Showtime Roundball? Of this there is no question.

The real uncertainty is whether or not the coaches and general managers - in corporate America - will play him again at point guard where all professional athletes really want to score: in product endorsements.

Prior to announcing being HIV-positive and his retirement from the game in 1991, Magic

With a stable of other athletes without image problems, not to mention cute animals - frogs, penguins, hippos, and Clydesdale horses - Mr. Johnson was relegated to Madison Avenue's side streets.

The problem was the way he became HIV-positive: loose consorts with too many ladies. First, the press that "loved" Magic for 15 years spread the word that he was gay; after all he kissed former Pistons great, Mr. Isiah Thomas, at an All-Star Game.

After the rumors that he was



Los Angeles Laker Earvin "Magic" Johnson.

welcomed him with open arms back into the fold. Dennis "Oddman" Rodman, of the Bulls, pushes and shoves him around as though he's trying to take his head off. No kid glove treatment. Being HIV-positive in the NBA is no technical foul for Mr. Earvin Johnson.

As with every other aspect of the game, there are the lessons to be applied to our everyday lives: perseverance, teamwork, courage, ability, selflessness, valor, boldness, and fearlessness. We constantly look to professional athletes to be role models. Mr. Magic Johnson stands alone as a role model and superstar on the signal he has sent to those among us suffering who are HIV-positive and with the AIDS virus.

When he suited-up again, Mr. Johnson gave strength, support, and cheer to the millions of sick people, who lay ravaged and seemingly without hope. He knows he is doing much more than running, jumping, and scoring baskets. He is sending out a message about beating the odds and using to the fullest, every minute that God gives us on this earth.

Mr. Johnson is living the lines of *Invictus*: "in the fail clutch of circumstance, I have

not winced nor cried aloud. It matters not how straight the gate, nor how charged with punishment for scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of the my soul."

To those of us without this affliction, he is also sending a message: who are we to judge? Perhaps too, to some among us, Mr. Johnson symbolizes the truth in that old saying: "save for the Grace of God, there go me... or my brother or my friend."

I have seen several friends suffer and die, ransacked as much by the disease as by the scorn and stigma and denunciation society puts on those who suffer from this modern counterpart of leprosy.

Mr. Johnson may not sell any more soft-drinks or tennis shoes, but he is giving away something much more valuable: he is handing over the ultimate triple-double: faith, hope, and dignity.

He is telling those who are HIV-positive and with AIDS that they must rely on God. And to those of us on the sidelines, Mr. Johnson is saying that God is the final referee and fan.

(Dr. William Turner is a regular freelance columnist for the Chronicle.)

LIFT EVERY VOICE

By DR. WILLIAM H. TURNER



was a chief spokesman/salesman for Converse shoes and Pepsi-Cola. Then, with a magic that was more like witchcraft, Mr. Johnson got an "image problem." Immediately, marketing executives shied away from him, showing a darkly disinclination to have their merchandise identified with a HIV-positive mouthpiece.

homosexual lost believability, maybe he should have laid it on an innocent blood transfusion or said that had he gotten it the way some NBA players fear he might give it to them - that zillion to one chance of contact with a scratch or head butt.

With his recent return, his fellow hoopsters, including Karl Malone of the Utah Jazz, have

Farrakhan's World Tour: The Issue of Nigeria

Louis Farrakhan has managed to outrage and anger white America once again. With his highly-publicized twenty-nation "world friendship tour," the leader of the Nation of Islam caucused with many African and Asian heads of state. This new level of political prestige and international recognition for Farrakhan was largely due to the dramatic success of the Million Man March in Washington, DC, last October.

Farrakhan's stated purpose for the tour, according to the Rev. Benjamin Chavis, was "to spread the uplifting spirit of the Million Man March abroad, particularly where issues of atonement, fratricide, reconciliation and peace are of paramount concern." However, Farrakhan's itinerary and his controversial statements abroad provoked widespread criticism in the U.S. media.

In Iran, Farrakhan was reported to have joined the celebration of the seventeenth anniversary of the overthrow of the Shah. The Iranian press quoted him as saying: "God will destroy America by the hands of Muslims. God will not give Japan or Europe the honor of bringing down the United States; this is an honor God will bestow upon Muslims."

In Iraq, Farrakhan expressed solidarity with dictator Saddam Hussein and suggested that United Nations economic sanctions against that country were parallel to the status of the Jews in Nazi death camps. According to JANA,

the Libyan Press Agency, the Libyan leader Muammar el-Gadhafi offered one billion dollars to Farrakhan to finance his political activities inside the U.S. Gadhafi declared after his meeting with Farrakhan: "Our confrontation with America used to be like confronting a fortress from the outside. Today we have found a loophole to enter the fortress from within."

It was not surprising that these statements and actions abroad provoked harsh condemnations from the government and the media. The State Department accused Farrakhan of "cavorting with dictators." The Departments of Treasury and Justice demanded information on Farrakhan's negotiations with Gadhafi and other foreign leaders. Even Kweisi Mfume, the new president of the NAACP, declared that Farrakhan's visit to such countries did "not help" efforts to establish "conformity with international law." But frankly, many of these criticisms will have little influence on most African-Americans. The white political establishment has always criticized black American leaders who have addressed international issues or who have traveled abroad—including Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.

However, I would challenge Farrakhan's political judgment on Nigeria. During his visit to the most populous nation of Africa, Farrakhan in effect gave his personal approval to the military

regime that only three months ago had noted writer/playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other human rights activists.

The background to the execution of Saro-Wiwa represents a mixture of corporate greed, environmental racism, and the brutality of a military dictatorship. Saro-Wiwa was the leader of a political movement among Nigeria's Ogoni people, calling for greater democratic rights and environmental protection measures to check oil pollution in the region. Shell Oil Company produces about one-half of Nigeria's oil, and has vast petroleum holdings in the Ogoni area. In the Ogoni ancestral land of 400 square miles, there are 96 oil wells and five pumping stations, where vast amounts of natural gas are burned 24 hours every day. Frequent oil spills have polluted water supplies and destroyed crops.

Virtually no profits from Shell's oil production went to the Ogoni people. When protests developed, Shell authorized the Nigerian government to send mobile police to suppress dissent. Shell paid for the transportation and salary bonuses of troops known as the "kill-and-go mob," who terrorized the local population.

Last year, Saro-Wiwa was arrested on false charges. He was tried before a mixed military-civilian court with no right of judicial appeal. Two witnesses for the prosecution later retracted their testimony, admitting that the Govern-

ment had bribed them. Nevertheless, Saro-Wiwa was executed. Nineteen more Ogoni are now awaiting trial. Human rights groups throughout the world were outraged by this example of despotism.

But Farrakhan chatted amicably with Saro-Wiwa's murderers. He even criticized Western governments for their condemnations of the Nigerian dictatorship. Farrakhan was reported to say: "They say that you hanged one man. So what? Ask them, too, 'How many did you hang?'"

Randall Robinson, president of TransAfrica, expressed "extreme disappointment" with Farrakhan's visit to Nigeria's military dictatorship. "His statements and the things that were said appear to make Minister Farrakhan an apologist for an authoritarian, corrupt and repressive regime."

Farrakhan's action on Nigeria call into question his entire political agenda. His right to travel and to engage in international dialogues must be defended. But on the issue of Nigeria, as far as black people's interests are concerned, he has much explaining to do.

(Dr. Manning Marable is Professor of History and Director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies, Columbia University, New York City. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 275 newspapers across the U.S. and internationally.)

NOTICE
OF A CITIZENS INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP
FOR PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION
OF A NEW RAIL CROSSING
IN THE VICINITY OF STRUCTURE (R-186)
NORTH OF WALKERTOWN
AND THE RELOCATION OF US 311

Project 8.1623101 R-2712 Forsyth County

A citizens informational workshop will be held on Wednesday, March 27, 1996 in the Walkertown Middle School Auditorium located at 3175 Ruxton Drive in Walkertown. This will be an informal open-house workshop conducted between the hours of 4:00 PM and 7:00 PM. Those wishing to attend may do so at their convenience during these hours.

The purpose of this informational workshop is to present information, answer questions, and receive comments during the early design stages of the proposal rail crossing in the vicinity of structure (R-186). The relocation of US 311 for a distance of approximately 0.3 mile to accommodate the new crossing will also be discussed.

Representatives of the Department of Transportation will be available to discuss the proposed project with those attending. Anyone desiring additional information about the workshop may contact Ms. Michele James, North Carolina Department of Transportation, Planning and Environmental Branch, P.O. Box 25201, Raleigh, NC 27611 or by telephone at (919) 733-7844 - Extension 213.

NCDOT will provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled persons who wish to participate in the workshop. To receive special services, please call Ms. James at the above number to give adequate notice to the date of the workshop.

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