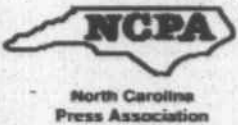


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Bob Johnson is on the wrong side of history



George Curry
Guest Columnist

Now that Hillary Clinton has finally acknowledged that she lost to Barack Obama, it appears that the only person still unaware of that is Bob Johnson. After embarrassing himself in South Carolina, Johnson is acting like the loser is supposed to determine the makeup of the presidential ticket. Consequently, he is leading a campaign to pressure Obama to pick Clinton as his Democratic running mate.

Like before, Johnson is fighting a losing battle. Just as Clinton didn't want anyone to push her out of the race, even after it became clear that she had no mathematical chance of overtaking the front-runner, Obama will not allow Johnson or anyone else force him to place Clinton on the ticket.

Would Bob Johnson, Charlie Rangel, Maxine Waters, Mary Frances Berry and other Black Hillary supporters be pushing as hard for the addition of Obama to the ticket if Clinton had defeated Obama? I doubt it. They are among the last African-Americans in the country still mesmerized by the Clintons.

In Johnson's case, I somewhat understand his attachment to the Clintons. As editor of Emerge magazine, which was owned by BET, I had a chance to attend social functions in Bob's home that were attended by the president. As a big time Democratic fundraiser, Bob exercised considerable clout, making sure that President Clinton and other newsmakers did not slight BET when they were doling out exclusive interviews.

But his supporting Hillary to the end - some say, after the end - will contribute to his mixed legacy.

Let me say upfront that during my seven years as editor of Emerge, I could not have asked for a more supportive boss. Bob Johnson not only supported me when we published covers that were admittedly over the edge, he actively encouraged me to stir up controversy. Not once in seven years did he ever ask me to tone down our coverage. And he gave me the financial resources to put out a magazine that won more than 40 national journalism awards. In 38 years of journalism, being editor of Emerge was by far the most exciting and fulfilling years of my career.

When I was at Emerge, I was also a regular panelist on "Lead Story," the Sunday morning roundtable of reporters hosted by Ed Gordon and later, Cheryl Martin. It, too, was unique. In addition to "Lead Story," there was "Teen Summit" and "BET News." In fact, BET carried more Black-oriented public affairs programs than all of the other cable channels combined.

What most people don't know about Bob Johnson is that he closed his company on the



Bob Johnson

day of the Million Man March and took out a full-page ad in USA Today expressing his support for the march called by Minister Louis Farrakhan. He attended the march and had Ed Gordon doing special reports throughout the day. Name one other major business, Black or White, that offered a paid holiday to its employees so that they could attend the Million Man March? I can't think of one.

Bob never gets enough credit for the positive things he has done. That's largely because the good deeds were overshadowed by the rump-shaking, degrading videos that ran and continue to run on BET. They were so vile that Bob Johnson didn't allow his kids to watch them. Even before he became a billionaire by selling BET to Viacom, every public affairs program, including "Lead Story," was taken off the air.

A group of BET magazines, including Emerge, were sold to Keith Clinkscales in preparation for the Viacom sale. Within several years, they were dead or in bankruptcy court. That, too, will remain a part of the Johnson and Clinkscales legacy.

Given Bob's unequivocal support for Emerge and the Million Man March, it was not unreasonable to expect him to support Obama. But like too many Black leaders, he was already wedded to the Clintons.

Campaigning in South Carolina, Johnson said the Clintons "...have been deeply and emotionally involved in black issues when Barack Obama was doing something in the neighborhood that - and I won't say what he was doing, but he said it in his book - when they have been involved."

After strongly denying that he was referring to Obama's experimentation with drugs as a youth, Johnson finally fessed up and apologized to Obama.

In contrast to standing tall at the Million Man March, Bob Johnson is on the wrong side of history. And even as Obama continues to make history, Johnson is still trying to foist Clinton off on the history maker.

When it comes to Hillary Clinton, African-Americans didn't listen to Bob Johnson in South Carolina and there's no need to listen to him now.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.



AIDS - Turn Words into Action



Phill Wilson
Guest Columnist

Black America's response to the AIDS crisis is finally gaining momentum. More Black people than ever before know someone with HIV/AIDS and/or are talking about it.

In light of this progress, it is tempting to think that the AIDS epidemic in our community is under control. But this is no time to be complacent. Black people are still being diagnosed, progressing to AIDS and dying from the disease more often than any other racial group in America.

To be fair, the progress we've made against AIDS is remarkable. High-profile community members ranging from Oprah to Obama have taken HIV tests in front of the television cameras in a bid to encourage other Black Americans to get tested.

And just last month, many of our community leaders came together with the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta to plan the next phase of the "Heightened National Response to the HIV Crisis among African Americans," which is spawning

innovative HIV prevention campaigns across the United States.

This is exactly what's needed - we need to take responsibility for the health of our community. And in some ways, all this increased public education is beginning to pay off. In a recent survey, Black people were the only ethnic group to say that HIV is the number one health problem in America.

So why do I still say, "AIDS in America today is a Black disease?" The truth is, while awareness - and lip service - about this disease may be rising, too many of us still don't know our HIV status, aren't in appropriate care and treatment, and aren't taking concrete steps to protect ourselves and our loved ones from becoming infected. When it comes to this disease, we've got to walk the talk.

The facts remain startling. Over 50 percent of HIV-positive African-Americans do not know they are HIV positive. For those who do get tested, it is often too late: Too late for treatment to be fully effective, too late to stop the progression from HIV to AIDS and too late to prevent significantly more AIDS-related deaths in our communities.

And there is a cruel irony here: Many of our people are dying just as HIV treatment reaches new heights. Today's medications mean HIV can be successfully treated over the long term with just 1 or 2 pills a

day. This is amazing progress compared to just a decade ago, when treatment was difficult to take and involved lots of pills. But because we're not getting tested for HIV early and often, many of our brothers and sisters are missing out on these advances.

Behind all of this is the ongoing challenge of HIV stigma.

Too many people are still too scared to take the test for fear of how others may react to a positive diagnosis. And too many people are discouraged by damaging misinformation and myths in our community about HIV. But times have changed.

Today, the stigma Black America really needs to be concerned about is the shame of not getting tested, and thereby not doing what it takes to end the AIDS epidemic in our communities. It is time for each one of us to take responsibility for the health - and the future - of our community.

I am one of a growing army of Black folks who are determined to safeguard our future. For now, AIDS is a Black disease. But when we have a clear plan, with specific goals and objectives, we do overcome. We learned that with the civil rights movement in the 1960s. And I can assure you, we will learn that as we work to end the AIDS epidemic in Black America.

In fact, at the Black AIDS

Institute, we already have a plan to stop AIDS. Our "Test One Million" campaign will:

- Reduce HIV rates in Black America;
- Dramatically increase the number of Black people who know their HIV status;
- Build an army of Black testing and treatment advocates; Increase the number of Black people seeking early treatment and care; and Decrease HIV stigma in Black communities.

Black America can win the battle against HIV/AIDS. But it's going to take all of us to play our part - and be part of the solution. We need regular HIV testing for all Black people, access to early treatment for those of us who test positive, and education to combat the misinformation and stigma that surrounds HIV.

Yes, Black people are finally talking about HIV/AIDS. And now it's time to turn words into action. Take control. Talk to your family and loved ones about HIV and get tested at least once a year.

Phill Wilson was diagnosed with HIV over a quarter century ago. He is the founder and chief executive officer of the Black AIDS Institute. For more information about the Test One Million campaign or to find free confidential HIV testing in your area, go to www.blackaids.org.

The Nov. 4 vote will count most



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Guest Columnist

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put Black Americans at the center of history almost 45 years ago when he won the Nobel Prize for leading a non-violent revolution against American racism and racial discrimination in our country.

Black Americans last week stood with Barack Obama at another crossroad, when the Senator made history by winning the Democratic nomination for president of the United States. The accomplishments of both these African-Americans were liberating - for Black people and for our country. With the Nobel Peace Prize, the world recognized not only King, but the significance of our non-violent movement for human rights and equal citizenship. Senator Obama's achievement has equivalent significance.

The high road he paved for hope and unity, and against division, moved voters beyond the old racism, just as King's non-violent resistance and his lyrical masterpieces of language, laced with love of country and of his white opponents, changed our country.

Both men had magical appeal, but personal charisma alone could not have broken the barriers of the ages. The courage of King's campaigns, defying violence with the brave and brilliant use of non-violence, was central to the direction he and the movement took, and to the ultimate victory of our movement.

Dr. King reached his goals with the huge 1963 March on



Washington and the achievement of three great civil rights statutes - the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Whatever happens in November, Barack Obama, too, has changed America. A Black American has defeated not just any opponent, but the most formidable, Hillary Clinton, whom we salute as a champion of the same issues and causes that Senator Obama and African Americans regard as fundamental.

Yet, Obama rose from community organizer and little-known senator, and came from nowhere in the polls to win 33 contests from South Carolina to Montana, to Clinton's 18, and the delegate majority necessary to capture the nomination.

Rarely has so sensational a turning point been a beginning and not a finale. Barack Obama has won the

Democratic nomination. Now he must win the presidency. His nomination gives him millions of Americans who already have voted that he should be our president. Now, all of us must be mindful that we must vote again and bring many more with us because the vote that counts most will be cast on Nov. 4. Victory is in sight, but not yet achieved.

Most challenging will be the winner-take-all arithmetic of presidential elections. Democratic primaries distribute delegates to each candidate according to the proportion he wins. To become president, the nominee must win entire majorities in a sufficient number of states. Even then, some states will count more than others because they have larger populations and therefore are assigned more electoral votes. It is this electoral vote total count that determines the presidency. Senator Obama has set new records for votes

from young Americans, African Americans and many others. He must now win a cross-section of America itself.

In our country, where most Americans share his values but not his race or background, Senator Obama's work has just begun. We must not let this unique moment in history and a path-breaking new future slip from our country.

The finale due on November 4th does not depend on Barack Obama alone. The presidency lies with us and in the hands of other Americans who understand that Barack Obama, who has already changed America can also change our posture in the world and with it bring the return of the best and highest use of American power.

Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Democrat, represents Washington, D.C. in the U.S. House.