

OPINION/ FORUM

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Sylvia Sprinke Hamlin talks about the 2009 NBTF.

Black Theater is for Everyone

We are excited about this year's National Black Theatre Festival. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company, which stages the festival, and the 20th anniversary of the festival itself.

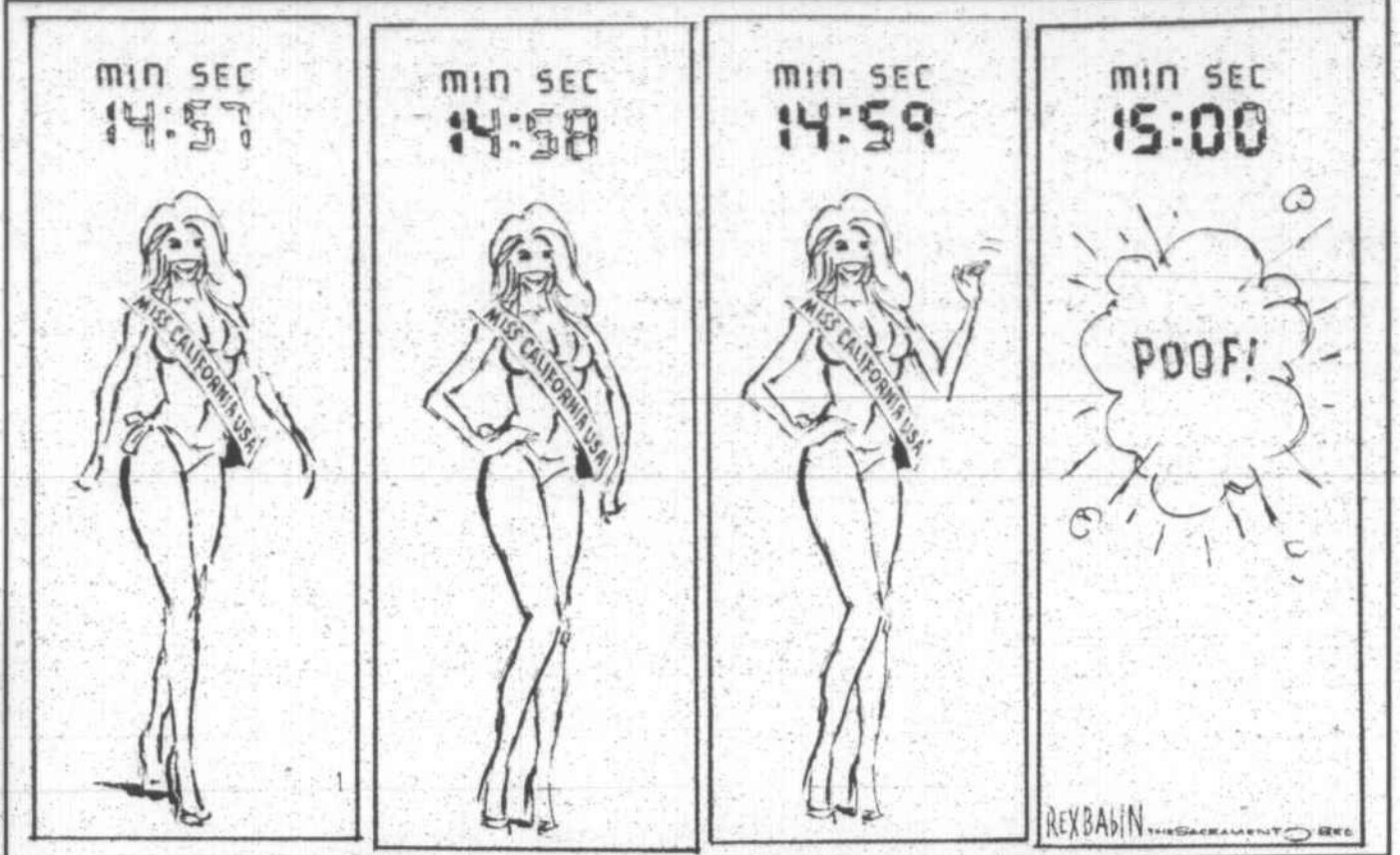
As we all know, the festival and the Black Rep are the visions of the late Larry Leon Hamlin - a man that all of us miss very much. When he died two years ago, there were doubts about whether the festival, and even the Black Rep, could survive without his larger-than-life presence. We know now that those doubts were unfounded.

Like any smart leader, Hamlin planted seeds decades ago and sprouted a group of talented young men and women. Over the years, Hamlin watered these seeds and this group sprouted into a driving force in both the NBTF and the Black Rep. Now that he's gone, this group - which includes folks like Lawrence Evans, Patrice Toney, Brian McLaughlin, Cleo Solomon, Luellen Curry, Roz Foxx, Elwanda Ingram and LaShonda Hairston - have worked overtime to make sure that his vision continues.

The leadership of both the festival and the theater company are also in great hands. Gerry Payton, the executive director, and Mabel Robinson, the creative director, have shown why Hamlin kept them so close to his side for so many years. And Hamlin's widow, Sylvia Sprinkle Hamlin, one of the city's most capable businesswomen, has provided a solid direction, while Annie Hamlin Johnson, Larry Leon Hamlin's colorful mother, has stepped up to provide some of the pizzazz that her son was known for.

The NBTF, like many businesses and ventures, is in a bit of a financial pinch this year. For those reasons and many more, we encourage every living and breathing soul to try to see some of the many performances that will come this year. This event has given this city and its people so much that the least we can do is buy a ticket or two or three to say thank-you.

Payton put it so eloquently this week at a local fund-raising event when she said the festival is for everyone. We understood that to mean that she expects some white folks to come out and enjoy some of the plays. The festival is "Black Theatre Holy Ground," but black theater is for everyone. It is about black culture, which is about everyone. It is about relationships that exist between blacks and whites. It is about life itself, told through and acted by black Americans for everyone. It is not a time for people to leave the city. It is a time for all people of the city to enjoy a unique cultural experience.



Another unjustified slaying



Al Sharpton
Guest Columnist

On May 28, Omar Edwards began his day like any other; kissing his 18-month-old and 7-month old children, hugging his wife and going out for another hard day's work.

But later that evening, 25-year-old Edwards' life was tragically and violently cut short when his body was riddled with bullets. This wasn't the work of a thug, a mentally challenged person nor a would-be thief. Instead, Edwards was shot several times by a fellow police officer - yes police officer - while in pursuit of an actual criminal. Another young Black man unjustifiably slain.

In cities and towns all across this country we hear the stories of young men and women of color being 'mistakenly shot at' or 'wrongfully killed'. There are continuous investigations of police department protocol and police conduct, and a plethora of excuses and justifications that slowly emerge.

But what is the unfathomable excuse of police officers killing a fellow comrade? How can so-called 'friendly fire' take place? And more importantly, how can we not hold the shooter, in this case 30-year-old Andrew Dunton, accountable?

Now people will attempt to argue that this isn't a Black/White issue, but how is it not when the only thing Dunton had to go on was Edwards' Blackness? Authorities will quickly safeguard Dunton and say Edwards was in plain clothes, but so was officer Dunton.

Once again, the presumed guilt and criminalization of young Black men was enough to warrant a shoot first, ask questions later mentality. Instead of attempting to tarnish Edwards, those leading an investigation should look in to Dunton, his record and the chain of events that lead to Edwards' untimely death.

Too often we focus on the victim and not the perpetrator; it's time to demand more.

The Edwardses, his young widow Danielle and their two babies buried officer Edwards last week. It



Omar Edwards

was a moving procession with his family, friends and colleagues who literally lined the streets in uniform.

They recounted Edwards' lifelong dreams and pursuits of becoming an NYPD officer. Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly both attended the somber event and pledged to raise Edwards' status to that of a first-grade detective in order for his family to obtain increased benefits. In other words, his salary was raised by about \$60,000; a mere \$60,000 while two children will forever be fatherless, Danielle a widow and his parents having to cope with the realization that they buried their own son.

This is not justice. We demand an outside federal investigation into what took place that tragic night. We demand answers to this inexplicable incident. We cannot tacitly accept that this was 'an unfortunate accident' or sit back without calling in to question officer Dunton and others present at the scene.

This, after all, wouldn't be the first time the NYPD has killed one of its own. In 2008, a Black off-duty Mount Vernon police officer was gunned down by a Westchester County policeman, and in 2006, officer Eric Hernandez was shot and killed by an on-duty patrolman.

If race is irrelevant to these cases, I ask, why are all of the countless victims people of color? If all rules and regulations were properly followed in Edwards' case, then let a federal investigation prove it. We owe it to a man who sacrificed his own life to truly serve and protect others.

It's time to demand answers because any justice delayed is undoubtedly justice denied.

The Rev. Al Sharpton is a well-known community activist and founder of the National Action Network.

Another Obama propagandistic slam dunk



Peter Bailey
Guest Columnist

In a January 2009 column, I wrote that "the bi-partisan powers-that-are in this country, the ones who paved the way for the historic election of Barack Hussein Obama as president of the United States, must be elated at the thus far tremendous success of their venture...."

I was referring to the brilliant way the inauguration celebration was handled from a public relations perspective, calling it a propagandistic slam dunk. President Obama's recent trip to the Middle East during which he met with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and delivered a speech directed toward the Islamic world was equally well planned and executed.

It is my belief that the only country in the Middle East that the United States powers-that-are really care about is Saudi Arabia, despite the fact that 15 of the 17 Arabs involved in the 9/11 attacks were Saudis.

They had/have problems with Saddam Hussein and Iran, not because they considered/considers either a direct threat to the U.S. but because they were/are a threat to Saudi Arabia and its oil wells. That's why President Obama's photo-ops meeting with a smiling King Abdullah must have warmed



President Obama disembarks from Marine One after arriving at the White House on Sunday after his trip to the Middle East and Europe.

the cold-blooded hearts of the real power brokers who ignore the screaming and whining from Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly and their fellow trash talkers.

As for the speech at Cairo University, it really didn't have much new information

to say about the Israeli-Arab conflict. Full of rhetorical flourishes, soaring platitudes and pious quotes from the Koran and the Talmud, the speech, with one significant exception, contained sentiments that either have been said or could have been said by any of President Obama's

immediate five predecessors. The exception being that neither of the others could mention having a Muslim father.

What made the speech historic and so enthusiastically received, despite its relative blandness, was that President Obama, in a public relations master stroke, delivered it in Cairo.

If it had been delivered, with the exact same content, in Washington, New York, Paris, London etc, it might have elicited a "been there done that, bought that t-shirt" response from many people.

As for those who are frothing at the mouth about President Obama comparing the situations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it is my Malcolm X - influenced skeptical viewpoint that Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was given the basic thrusts of the speech when he recently visited President Obama in Washington. The Israelis know that when all is said and done, they have the Bomb and the Arabs don't.

From all indications, many, if not most, Arabs were very impressed with and moved by President Obama's speech. Thus, the U.S. powers-that-are are all aglow about another propagandistic slam dunk.

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