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Whose history is it anyway?

By John William Templeton
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Whose history is it, anyway? That's the question Barbara Chase-Riboud is asking in a lawsuit about who tells the story of one of the most critical events of African American history.

Her suit also highlights one of the biggest problems faced by today's African American businesses — protecting their ideas and intellectual property from big companies whom they approach for distribution and capital.

Amistad was a ship that African captives seized from their captors and sailed into a U.S. port. Their case made history because an American court upheld their freedom, in a case argued by former President John Quincy Adams.

The name Amistad, like that of Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey and the maroons, has become a symbol of courage and commitment to fight for freedom.

Chase-Riboud, who has built a solid literary career with historical novels on such topics as Amistad and Sally Hemings, took notice when the news of this movie came out. She had sent a movie proposal based on her Amistad book to DreamWorks founder years before, without response, she said.

Now she's asking to see the script, pointing out similarities between characters created for her novel and those portrayed in the screenplay.

The situation represents an almost insurmountable dilemma for creative entrepreneurs like Chase-Riboud. Cutoff from insider networks at major distribution companies, black businesses are often forced to send proposals blindly to anonymous offices.

Most times, there is never an acknowledgment that the pro-



PHOTO/DREAMWORKS

The movie "Amistad" is a story about a slave revolt told through a white filmmaker's lens.

posal has been received. Unfortunately, the first notice can come in public, when they see their proposal or product on the market. It behooves entrepreneurs to understand that their most valuable product is their intellectual property and that they must take measures such as registering trademarks and service marks before sending out valuable information.

However, a small company that sues a large company faces long odds, even when right.

I had the foresight to protect properties developed as part of my book "Our Roots Run Deep: the Black Experience in California." Even so, a Southern California utility which was asked to sponsor our photo exhibition of the same name later decided to appropriate the term for its advertising to tout its minority business program, without paying for the privilege. How ironic?

And almost any black vendor can tell their own horror story about seeing their work turn up under someone else's banner.

In the case of Chase-Riboud,

along comes Hollywood, no respecter of history, or even the present — particularly when it comes to African-Americans. That is a long-standing tradition.

In 1918, Noble Johnson and four partners began the Lincoln Motion Picture Co. to present a realistic view of Black America. Johnson was the first major Black contract player with a big studio (Universal).

Indeed, the Lincoln's five films began to outdraw his movies for Universal, which forced Johnson to make a choice between his job and his company. Johnson continued a long movie acting career, including breakthroughs as a makeup artist and as an animal trainer. But his movie-making voice was silenced. George Johnson, his brother, fortunately preserved the films of the 50-year period that black filmmakers valiantly competed with the major studios in a collection that is now held at the UCLA Library.

Seventy years later, Hollywood still presumes to tell the African-American story — blocking the distribution of "Sankofa," Haile Gerima's independently pro-

duced account of the Middle Passage. Now, the appropriately-titled Dreamworks Studio has decided to film its own version of Amistad.

Choices made for key positions such as screenwriter indicate that we are headed for as warped a presentation as such movies as "Mississippi Burning" (remember the FBI leading the civil rights movement in the Deep South), or "Native Son" (which implied that Bigger Thomas' problem was that he didn't trust White people).

Our ultimate solution is to form our own networks and to present proposals on the basis of solid personal relationships. Gerima's "Sankofa" demonstrates what a little pride can produce.

If DreamWorks continues to stonewall Chase-Riboud, the black community should take the same attitude as the Africans who seized the ship rather than just go along for the ride. If Amistad can be perverted, then nothing in our culture is sacred.

JOHN WILLIAM TEMPLETON is executive editor of "Griot," the African American, African and Caribbean business daily.

Why I'm backing Jim Richardson

Former commissioner can help shape a better future for Mecklenburg County

By Parks Helms
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The following are comments made by former Mecklenburg County Commissioners Chairman Parks Helms during a rally announcing Jim Richardson's intention to run at-large for a seat on the board.

In recent days many people have asked me "What is wrong with our community? And "What can I do about it?" In each instance I have urged them to get involved in the political process — to get to know the candidates and their stand on relevant issues — and even to file and run for office. These questions have come from Democrats and Republicans alike. And my response has been the same regardless of party affiliation.



Richardson

We are here today to begin what I hope will be a vigorous and honest campaign about the future of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and this region of North Carolina. For too long, the important process of making public policy has been overshadowed by the energetic and highly effective efforts of the private sector in creating the healthy economic momentum we now enjoy. The time has come for the role of politics and politicians to be a creditable part of shaping our future.

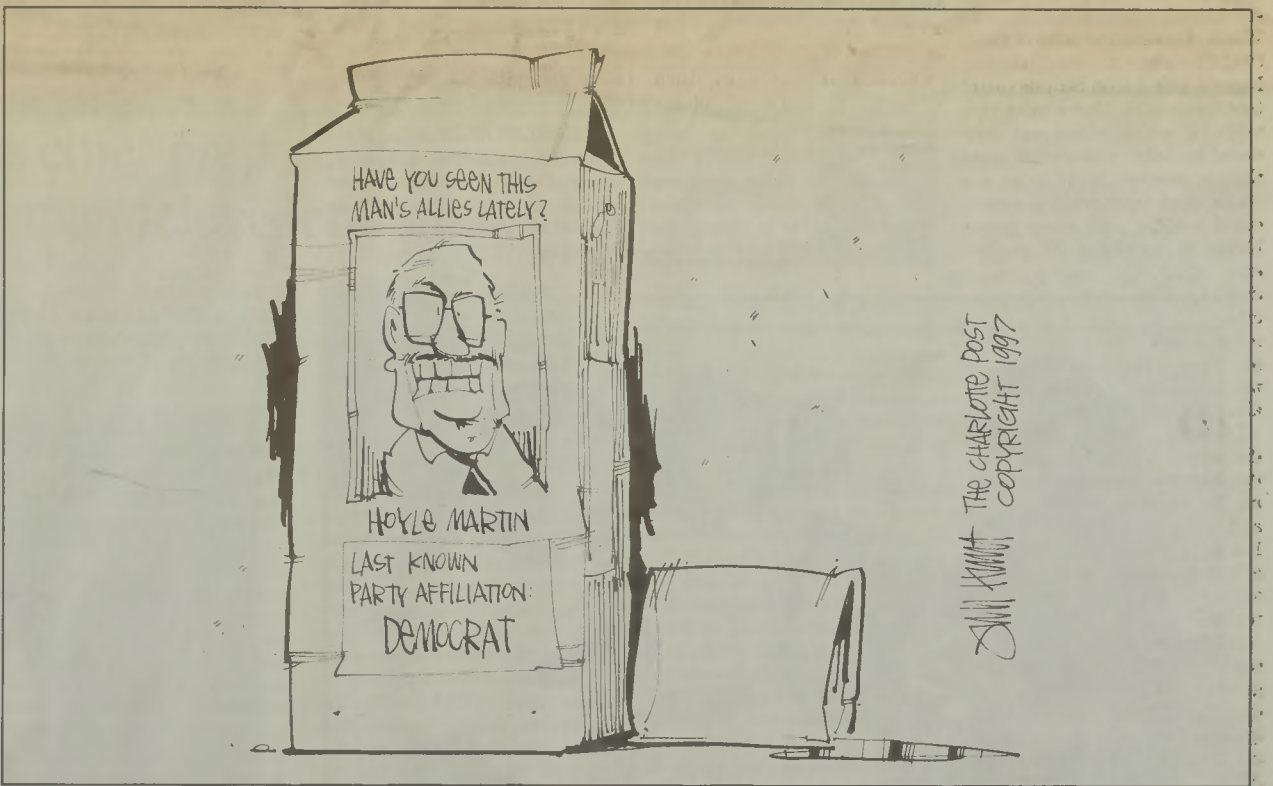


Helms

Our goal of creating a safe livable, prosperous, healthy and united community cannot be accomplished unless we renew the traditional partnership among the business, civic, religious and political communities that has marked our progress thus far. We must elect men and women who understand that we are at a crossroads — and whose agenda is to build relationships and to build community and to take advantage of the potential we have at this point in our history.

Jim Richardson has a history of public service that is unequalled in this community. He has served 10 years in the North Carolina Senate and two terms on the Mecklenburg County Commission. He is a man with the highest of ethical and moral values, and has a vision for this county that is both inclusive and challenging. I am highly honored that Jim Richardson is here to announce that he, along with me, will be an at-large candidate for the Mecklenburg county Board of Commissioners.

This is a new beginning that should help answer the question: "What can we do?" I urge every person who cares about our community — Democrats, Republicans and unaffiliated — to join Jim Richardson and me as we seek to preserve our reputation as a New South community that is accepting, tolerant and committed to all of God's children.



Sprewell a victim of sports racial double standard

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

For nearly an hour I listened to a sports talk jock call Latrell Sprewell every vile name in the book. Finally near the end of the hour, one caller asked why he didn't blast San Francisco 49ers owner, Eddie DeBartolo with the same vehemence for sullying the sport for an alleged bribery attempt and associating with gamblers. The jock lamely croaked that it wasn't the same thing, and cut to a commercial. When he came back on-air he instantly went back on the attack against Sprewell.

But the caller asked a fair question. One week I counted 57 Associated Press wires stories on Sprewell, and exactly 11 on DeBartolo. There were dozens of irate letters in the New York Times, Washington Post and the L.A. Times on Sprewell, but only a handful of letter writers made

mention of DeBartolo. There's only one reason. One is white, rich, and a well-connected team owner. The other is black, for the moment poor, and one of many NBA players.

While no sane person would condone Sprewell's behavior, or suggest he shouldn't be stiffly punished, Sprewell is hardly the only "bad citizen" in sport to act up — many whites such as DeBartolo do too. But when they do, the double standard quickly kicks in. It goes like this: When black athletes are accused of, or are guilty of wrongdoing, their punishment is swift and harsh, the public is merciless, they are pounded pitilessly by the media, and they become the eternal poster boys for deviancy. When whites admit to or are accused of wrongdoing there is much hand-wringing, apologetics, and kid glove rationalizations to explain their behavior, and their names quickly disappear from the headlines.

Sprewell, however, isn't the first black athlete get a hard lesson in this racial double-standard. Pete Rose bet on his team, the Cincinnati Reds, consorted with known gamblers and loan sharks, and evaded federal taxes. He finally admitted that he had a gambling problem, got a five-year federal prison sentence, and was banned from baseball.

Yet, when he was disqualified from baseball's Hall of Fame in 1991, baseball fans and sports-writers were enraged. "The Rose case," New York Times sports columnist Ira Berkow wrote, "has touched the emotions of a surprisingly large number of people." Berkow, fans and sports-writers roundly criticized Commissioner Fay Vincent and the judges who voted to disqualify him.

By contrast, Michael Jordan didn't bet on his team. But following an orgy of media speculation that Jordan was involved with gamblers, NBA commission-

er David Stern quickly investigated. He found out that Jordan was not guilty of anything illegal and had committed no rule violations. It did not stop the rumors, innuendoes and accusations. When Jordan refused to respond to the allegations in the press many sportswriters pounced.

One sports columnist in a major daily twisted Jordan's silence to imply that he was guilty of wrongdoing. Another columnist in the same paper lectured him on his responsibility to uphold a public image. The pressure of the gambling controversy and the murder of his father probably briefly forced Jordan out of the game at the height of his career. A less airborne Mike came back. The fans and the sports establishment cheered again. But Mike probably knows that if he ever slips again those cheers could just as easily turn to jeers.

Although ex-Nebraska and St. Louis Rams running back Lawrence Phillips admitted guilt

and was sentenced for assaulting his girlfriend, the media and sportswriters did not forgive or forget. There were endless stories on the "troubled" Phillips. Any time his name crops up sports writers run through the whole litany of Phillips off-field troubles. Meanwhile his white Nebraska teammate, Christian Peter, was accused of multiple counts of assault and rape. Yet there was bare media attention of it.

It's probably no consolation to Sprewell but he now travels in select company. His misdeeds like those of disgraced black sports "idols" Mike Tyson, Michael Irvin, Daryl Strawberry, O.J. Simpson and Dennis Rodman almost certainly will be



Simpson



Jordan



Tyson

beaten to death, resuscitated, and beaten to death again by the media and the public into perpetuity. This while the misdeeds of white sports notables Andrew Golota, Marv Albert and Mickey Mantle are buried, or they become objects of pity. It's not fair, but who said racial double standards are.

EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON is author of "The Assassination of the Black Male Image" and "The Crisis in Black and Black."