

Chavis-Led Organization Encourages Black America to Save Itself

By Al Brown
Special to the NNPA
Courtesy of the Houston Defender

The black empowerment organization founded by Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. during his last days as head of the NAACP is successfully evolving from its infancy stage.

Born from the ideology that black America has to take control of its own destiny, The National African American Leadership Summit (NAALS) focuses on economic empowerment, more black political education, as well as the saving and cultivating of black youths.

A believer that organizations advocating black issues should be black-run, black-financially backed and should include the leadership of all of black America, Chavis and his young organization faced a tough test at last June's Baltimore Summit.

By inviting Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan to the NAALS table despite a fury of white corporate and Jewish protest, Chavis refused to buckle in to pressure, setting a strong tone for the new organization. While the move may have been unpopular with conservative blacks, Chavis received encouragement and support from the grassroots segment of black America.

Now, on the first year anniversary of the Baltimore Summit, Chavis and the NAALS are gaining rapid exposure and wider acceptance across America.

On the eve of the fourth National African American Leadership Summit held in Houston June 9-11, Chavis candidly described the inner workings of the NAALS, its purpose and what the organization needs from black America.

Defender: What's the summit's role?

Chavis: We really have a dual role. One is empowering the African-American community and dealing with some of the internal divisions and working to bridge those divisions. But externally, we have the job of reeducating the larger society including white America.

Right now the black community is being scape-goated for all of America's ills. We intend to stand up and say no to the scapegoating and proactively try to engage our own people, particularly our young people; one of the most encouraging things about the Summit so far has been the attraction of young African Americans.

Defender: Are more summits planned before concrete implementation is set in motion?

Chavis: The summit is still in its embryo state. But over the last 12 months there has been a growing outcry, particularly at the grassroots level, for the summit to become a membership based organization. That will be discussed at the Houston Summit.

In fact, this is the pivotal summit. If delegates and participants approve and ratify a constitution and bylaws, the Houston Summit will birth a new organization.

Another concrete proposal to come from the Houston Summit is the strategy to mobilize one million black men to march on Washington October 15 of this year. That's very concrete.

Thirdly, over the last nine months we have been working quietly to put in place a African-American development fund, which will be a venture capital fund to assist African-American business persons and also focus on youth entrepreneur training.

We realize last year that the black community has not placed enough emphasis on economic development. In other words, if African Americans are going to look towards the 21st century as having a sustained presence in the U.S., we're going to have to work hard to build an economic infrastructure for our community. The summit is committed to that process. That's the purpose that we invited African-American business leaders from across the country.

Another definitive turn that this summit takes is that it is the first that representatives from Africa (Ghana, Liberia, Angola, Nigeria and South Africa) will sit at the table with us.

The NAALS will help to promote the establishing of joint business ventures between African Americans and Africans. We are also looking out to Caribbean.

We're expanding the scope of the summit, but in order to be effective, there has to be people committed to implementing the plans and programs. We now have a full-time operational office in Washington, D.C.

Defender: The NAALS was born without traditional funding from corporate America. How will the organization be funded?

Chavis: That's also under discussion at this meeting. I believe that the NAALS should receive its funding directly from the African-American community and not engage in grant making proposals to foundations.

With the NAALS, we're departing from the traditional route. We believe the African-American community will support a grassroots and a national organization to the extent of which that organization will advocate unapologetically.

While all these right wing decisions are being made in the Congress and at the state level, there's a void of response; no one is challenging the Contract With America; the Supreme Court just ruled against minority scholarships; California Governor Pete Wilson recently signed an executive order to eliminate affirmative action and the Voting Rights Act is under attack.

In a few months various forces can erode 20 years of progress. This is a very serious matter. Through the NAALS we intend to engage those forces pro-actively, not necessarily just in reaction to what they do. In other words, we believe that the fundamental uplifting and destiny of the African-American community is in our hands.

We will not depend on the government or forces outside of the African-American community. This is the mistake that some of the other African-American organizations have made. There has been an old reliance on help from outside the community without putting enough emphasis on galvanizing and refocusing and redirecting the wealth of talent and resources that are in the African-American community.

African-Americans spend \$400 billion yearly. But most of that spending has nothing to do with our liberation, has nothing to do with our self-fulfillment, but concentrates on funding the very forces that oppress us, and we're trying to change that.

Defender: What is NAALS role in upcoming national elections?

Chavis: We will play a role by registering African Americans to vote. For example, when the one million men march in Washington, we're making sure that they are registered.

We realize that this is the eve of the 1996 presidential election and we will weigh in. But we will weigh in on the issues that affect the quality of life of the African-American community rather than get into a situation where we blindly follow a candidate or a party.

What we'll do is help disseminate political education and voter education because we've found as you do voter registration and voter mobilization, if there's no voter education, voters still may not vote, even though registered.

Defender: Will the organization provide an avenue for dialogue with black conservatives and black Republicans?

Chavis: Oh, no question. Part of our principles is that we have to outreach to all the diverse forces in our community, whether Democrats, Republicans, conservative, moderate or liberal, we want everybody at the table.

Defender: If the targeted goal of the one million men march on Washington falls short in numbers, will it slow NAALS's momentum?

Chavis: No. We believe that the very call for such a demonstration already has had some therapeutic consequences in the community. In my travels across the country over the last nine months, I see brothers preparing themselves by trying to get off drugs, alcohol and find jobs, so that when October 15 is here they will have their backs straightened.

Defender: What's the significance of the march?

Chavis: The significance of the march is partly what will happen after the march. This will not be an anonymous march; people are registering to march, we're getting names and addresses. We're going to build a computer base to network and hold this together.

Defender: There are many unheard voices in black America that have never had a forum to share their knowledge and proposed solu-

tions. Will the NAALS welcome critical dialogue from this group?

Chavis: One reason that we include the National Town Hall Meeting as part of the summit is so that we can gather input from the community of the city where the summit is held.

Defender: Will the NAALS make an attempt to present issues in a clear and definable way, so that it brings a faster understanding to the African-American community as a whole and not just those who are well-educated?

Chavis: Clarity was genius of the 1960s. It was crystal clear what the issues were and also clear of how those at the local level could participate.

Today, in terms of how issues are framed, there's a lot of confusion. For example, take affirmative action, we've allowed the right wing to wrongly define it, and they've done the same with welfare. People on welfare did not build the welfare system, but they want to blame welfare

mothers as if they are criminals.

Defender: In summation, what are some immediate challenges facing black America?

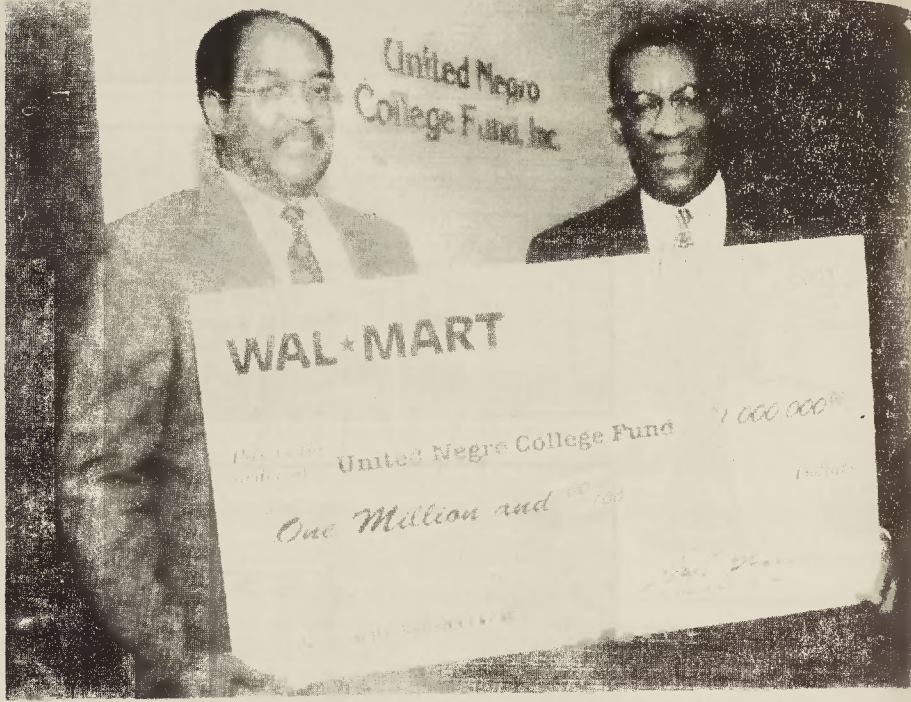
Chavis: Political education, economic development and the embracing of our youth in terms of encouraging leadership development. I've said that what we need to do is raise up a new generation of freedom fighters.

Defender: The NAALS was formed while you were still head of the NAACP, had you not left the NAACP what would have happened to the NAALS?

Chavis: It would have been a priority of the NAACP. Ironically, many local NAACP branches are still participating in the NAALS.

Defender: What do you want to say to black America?

Chavis: One essential message that the summit is trying to deliver is how important it is for the black community for its destiny. In our view, there is no guilt left in the white community that we can appeal to.



UNCF SCHOOLS GET CORPORATE BOOST FROM WAL-MART — Coleman Peterson (right), senior vice president of the People Division for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., presents a \$1 million contribution to William H. Gray III, president and chief executive officer of the United Negro College Fund, for UNCF's Campaign 2000.

An Investment in America's Future. The campaign is helping 41 UNCF colleges restore and build facilities, strengthen endowments, create new educational programs, improve administration and increase scholarship funds. Peterson, an active supporter of UNCF, is a former member of the St. Louis UNCF advisory board.

Letter to the Editor: TRIO Programs Threatened

The United States House of Representatives and the Senate have now approved Budget Resolutions which assure the complete elimination of TRIO Programs at the end of the 1995-96 academic year. While this recommendation is certainly not law, it does pose the greatest single threat the TRIO Programs have ever faced.

TRIO Programs should not be eliminated. Funding TRIO is an investment in our nation's future. TRIO Programs' graduates are productive, tax paying, contributing citizens to the American economy. They are not on the welfare or prison rolls. TRIO graduates are self-sufficient participants in the American society.

TRIO Programs include: Upward Bound, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Centers, and Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement. Each of these programs provide opportunity and realistic chances for Americans from poor and working families to enter college and graduate. Nationally, there are 1700 TRIO Programs currently serving an estimate 681,000 students from low-income backgrounds. North Carolina currently has 62 TRIO Programs and is serving 19,262 students throughout the state.

TRIO Programs are successful. Students in the Upward Bound Program are four times more likely to earn an undergraduate degree than those students from similar backgrounds who did not participate in TRIO. Nearly twenty percent (20%) of all black and Hispanic freshmen who en-

tered college in 1981 received assistance through TRIO Talent Search or Educational Opportunity Center programs.

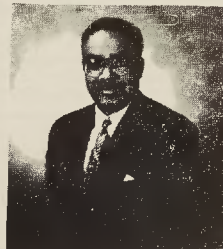
Students in the TRIO Student Support Services program are more than twice as likely to remain in college than those students from similar backgrounds who did not participate in the program. Since 1965, the beginning of the TRIO Programs, it is estimated that TRIO has produced and estimated 2 million college graduates.

North Carolina TRIO Programs have produced [the state's] share of outstanding citizens. For example, the current recipient of the North Carolina Board of Governors "Teacher in Excellence Award" was presented to a 1971 University of North Carolina Upward Bound graduate, Dr. Freddie Parker, professor of History at North Carolina Central University, Dr. Parker, Dr. Francisina Register-Jackson (1969 TRIO graduate), a professor of Education at North Carolina Central University, and Dr. Ricky Spoon, Assistant District Attorney of Wake County, represent numerous TRIO participants in North Carolina who have excelled and succeeded in academics and life.

TRIO Programs are in the national interest and are equally contributors to deficit reduction; not producers of public dependency. A well educated citizenry will keep America the leader of the free world. Please join me in [bringing to a halt] the war on opportunity and access for millions of Americans from poor and working families across this great nation.

Joyce D. Clayton, President
North Carolina Council of
Educational Opportunity Programs

Investing Globally Makes Sense But Requires Caution



Submitted by L.B. Harrison, Personal Financial Planner (919) 933-1163

We're encouraged these days to "think globally" regarding environmental issues. Many investors are thinking globally, too, by giving their portfolios an international focus.

Investing globally seems to make a lot of sense. Returns on world markets in the past couple of years have been relatively strong and those who have been investing in foreign securities have done well.

World markets, similar to U.S. market segments, do not move necessarily in the same direction, while some are moving downward, others are trending upward. The opportunities to make excellent returns do exist. There's no question, also, that diversification of your portfolio is a sound idea, particularly on a long-term basis.

But international investing has a downside. Financial experts say that world markets seem to move more in tandem when financial markets are going through periods of volatility. When international markets are calm, their movements show no strong relationship to each other; when they're trending downward, however, they tend to go down together.

Currently, global markets are in a volatile cycle. So, while investing overseas is a good idea in general, it's best to exercise caution with this approach. Don't jump into the markets in Mexico and the Pan Pacific simply because it's the trendy thing to do.

Be aware that the risks are high, and educate yourself about them. Know that most investors in foreign markets generally hold onto international stocks for shorter periods of time than they do when investing in U.S. securities. In order to add more diversity to their portfolios, they select stocks that have no relationship to their current investments.

Before plunging into foreign markets, you may want to ask for advice for a professional. Talk to your financial planner to determine how global investing might fit into your long-term financial goals. A knowledgeable planner can help you map out a strategy that gives you a balanced portfolio that reflects your comfort regarding risk.

If you decide to invest overseas, you may want to consider starting with mutual funds run by experienced portfolio managers. While this is a more conservative approach that won't provide you with an opportunity to strike it rich on a "sure bet," it will limit your risk from an investment that could go sour.

Particularly now, when world markets — including the U.S. — seem to be in a period of volatility and uncertainty, you should exercise caution. Choose global investments with care, and make sure to spread your risk adequately.

The reason crime doesn't pay is that when it does it is called by a more respectable name.

—Laurence J. Peter