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R. Kelly Gives NAACP An 'Image' Problem With Nomination

By Vicki T. Lee
Special to the NNPA from the Afro Newspapers

BALTIMORE (NNPA) - In 2002, critics wondered if child pornography charges would be the downfall of R. Kelly's prolific, if not altogether morally defined, career. Now, in 2004, Kelly's tainted image is not an issue for the NAACP; Kelly's album, *Chocolate Factory*, made the cut as a finalist for the NAACP Image awards. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is a name that represents leadership, status and a collective voice. It's the civil rights organization with the task of supporting African-Americans in the elimination of disparity and vociferating the accomplishments and honors within the black community.

An outcry of criticism about a perceived lack of focus on African-American issues has plagued the organization's hard-won stellar image, and is now reaching new heights — or lows — with its Kelly album nomination. In its 35th year, the purpose of the NAACP Image awards is to "honor projects and individuals that have demonstrated exemplary works by and for people of color." Supporting an R. Kelly - the music industry's sometimes bad and sometimes good boy of R&B - doesn't sit well with the "image" concept of the NAACP ceremony, according to Project 21 members. Kelly was charged in 2002 with 21 counts child pornography - based on video image allegedly of him and a 13-year-old girl in a sexual encounter - and later, 12 counts of child pornography photos in

Florida. Project 21, an affiliate of the conservative National Center for Public Policy Research in Washington, takes umbrage at the use of the word "image." "If we were speaking of the Grammys, which are awarded exclusively on musical merit," said David Almasi, director of Project 21, "R. Kelly's personal life would not be a factor." "R. Kelly may be a competent musician," said Mychal Massie, a member of Project 21. "But the purpose of the NAACP Image awards is to spotlight those who have used entertainment to raise the reputation of black Americans. With problems such as black-on-black crime, out-of-wedlock births, the intentional disdain for education as being white and out-of-control abortion rates rampant, one would like to think that the NAACP, which claims to represent the best interest of the black community, would insist on a more reputable individual as a model of excellence to be emulated and extolled."

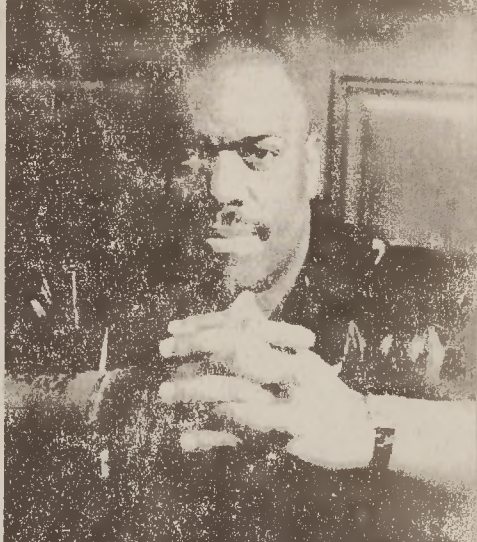
Trial dates for the Kelly cases are pending. NAACP President Kweisi Mfume disagreed that the "Chocolate Factory" nomination would cast a negative light on the organization. "We have to remember that we are Americans, not Iraqis, and believe in the presumption of innocence," Mfume said. "It's up to the court to decide. This is not a humanitarian award and he is not being nominated. These are the Image awards. If this was a nomination for R. Kelly as a vocalist... I think we have to let the process run its course and allow the members to vote."

The process is as follows: * Label executives, artists and others submit entries in each of 35 categories; * A 300-member committee - 150 NAACP staff and board (including Mfume) and 150 individuals in the entertainment industry - narrows the submissions down to five nominees per category; * NAACP members cast their vote for one candidate per category via the NAACP's Crisis magazine and online, a 30-day process.

Kelly tops the list of nominations for outstanding album with other hopefuls (*Dance with my Father*), Luther Vandross; (*The Diary of Alicia Keys*), Alicia Keys; (*Love & Life*), Mary J. Blige; and (*Speakerboxxx-The Love Below*), OutKast. "Generally our members are pretty responsible for voting for the winners and they make the final determination," said John White, speaking for the NAACP's national office.

Mfume believes that any criticism regarding R. Kelly is no different than previous criticisms about earlier NAACP nominations, such as Danny Glover's portrayal of Mister in (*The Color Purple*), Denzel Washington's portrayal of a rogue cop in (*Training Day*), and comments deemed negative toward Rosa Parks in (*Barbershop*). "You have to understand that these are nominations," Mfume said, "which are recommendations. This is a process that can't be measured until it's completed, not until the night they open the awards." While the NAACP has total control of the Image awards - broadcast on Fox television, including final sign-off on everything from production to program sponsors - no criteria exists that you have to be of a certain character to qualify for nomination in a category, according to NAACP personnel.

DURHAM'S GRAMMY NOMINEES



The Sensational Nightingales, Shirley Caesar and John P. Kee have Grammy nominations for their work in the field of gospel music. Ms. Caesar has been nominated for the album "Shirley Caesar And Friends" in the Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album. Also in the category are the Sensational Nightingales for the album "Songs to Edify." John P. Kee as choir director of the New Life Choir has been nominated for the album "Blessed By Association" in the Best Gospel Choir or Chorus Album. The program is set for Feb. 8, 8 p.m. on CBS.

New LDF Head is Prepared To Take on The Far Right

By Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Theodore M. "Ted" Shaw, selected to succeed Elaine R. Jones as new president and director-counsel of the 64-year-old NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, says he expects continued assaults on equal opportunity programs by Right-wing conservatives. "That fight has not ended. We still have attacks on all kinds of programs. It isn't clear what the next attack is going to be by the Far Right, but, we're preparing to meet them whether it's on pipeline programs, mentoring programs or scholarship programs," says Shaw. "In the eyes of the radical Right, all of these programs should be illegal. We've got to fight their attempts to end them."

He adds, "It's important for people of good will to understand that the stakes are very high and that these people's perverted view of what constitutes fairness would prevent any attempt to voluntarily and consciously address racial inequality in a targeted way." Shaw will serve as LDF's fifth head, rising from the position of staff attorney in 1982 to his current position of associate director-counsel. His leadership of LDF begins as racial and social issues are illuminated by a high-profile presidential race and the anniversary of the Brown case, which enforced desegregation of public schools.

"In general, we're going to continue to be the law firm for African-Americans nationally when it comes to systemic racial discrimination," Shaw says. Among issues of high priority in addition to affirmative action is a racially biased criminal justice system.

"The war on drugs has been distorted into a war on the people of color and the way in which the death penalty is still being implemented," Shaw explains. "We know that it has never been and cannot be made to be a fair system; and all the evidence is in now about people being convicted for crimes they did not commit and sentenced to death. While we have been able to exonerate some of these individuals, what we don't know is if we've executed people who were never exonerated and should have been."

Shaw will be taking the helm at the LDF May 1 when the blunt-spoken Jones steps down. The change in leadership coincides with

the 50th anniversary of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* U. S. Supreme Court ruling, argued by LDF May 17, 1954.

"The board [unanimously] made this decision without hesitation because there is no better person to continue the extraordinary mission of shaping and influencing the civil rights of our nation," says Elaine Jones, whom Shaw replaces. "Ted understands the issues and will continue to advance the institution's goals."

Shaw, 49, is more measured, though no less committed, than his predecessor. "She has a fire in her and a charisma that I can not pretend to emulate. But, I also know that both of us share in our commitment to the principles of racial justice," Shaw says. "I intend to carry on the work that Elaine has done to keep the LDF as a preeminent organization that fights for racial justice."

The LDF's fight in the high-profile *Kemba Smith* case is an indication of its effectiveness.

A college student sentenced to 24.5 years in prison for a peripheral role in a northern Virginia drug ring involving her now deceased boyfriend, Smith was pardoned by President Clinton and granted clemency shortly before Christmas 2000. Jones had fought for her release since reading the first of three articles published on Smith's plight in "Emergence: Black America's Newsmagazine."

Shaw says economic inequality and voting rights will also remain among priorities.

"We're going to do that work that removes barriers of full economic participation in employment and red-lining across the board. Anything that limits full economic participation of African-Americans and people of color," he says.

Section Five of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, commonly called the pre-clearance clause will be up for renewal in 2007. Among other requirements, the clause requires certain states with a history of racial discrimination in the electoral system to clear any new voting or election laws or procedures through the U. S. Department of Justice prior to being put in place.

He must battle within a climate of newly appointed conservative federal judges, such as Mississippi Judge Charles Pickering, a recess appointment to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals by President Bush.

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Landmark Supreme Court decision is theme of Black History Month

By Deborah Kong

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - She's been helping organize Black History Month events for 25 years, but Sylvia Cyrus-Albritton has noticed something a little different about this February: an intensely personal response to the celebration's theme.

The topic, the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision, has generated an outpouring of enthusiasm and a flood of events planned this month by schools, libraries and other organizations.

"It's a more emotional issue. The mood is more personal," said Cyrus-Albritton, interim executive director of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, the Washington, D.C., group that sets Black History Month themes.

"That decision affected people on a much different level than some of the other themes for Black History Month. ... It just challenged the moral fabric of this country."

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that separating black and white children in public schools was unconstitutional. Segregating students solely on the basis of their race denied black children the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law, it said.

"In the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place," the court ruled.

"Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

The ruling overturned the court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which concluded there was nothing unconstitutional about a Louisiana law that required separate but equal railroad cars for black and white passengers.

"Brown broke the back of American apartheid," said Theodore Shaw, associate director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. "It was a case that finally breathed life into the 14th Amendment for African-Americans."

"Brown gave the civil rights movement a great boost," agreed historian John Hope Franklin, who helped develop the legal brief that led to the *Brown* decision. "It became an armor in their fight to equalize opportunity - not only education, but in other areas, too."

A year and a half later, a tired, black seamstress named Rosa Parks refused to yield her seat to a white passenger, launching the yearlong Montgomery bus boycotts. The campaign ended after a Supreme Court decision declared the city's segregated seating unconstitutional.

It was a sign of how *Brown* energized both activists and the courts. Over the next 12 years, the Supreme Court "handed down decision after decision that fol-