

# commentary

## New Ideas

### Needed to

### Invigorate the NAACP

By George E. Curry  
NNPA Columnist



The votes are in and now it's time to rally behind the candidate. No, I am not talking about presidential politics. I am referring to the NAACP's decision to hire 35-year-old Benjamin Jealous as its next president.

Prior to the selection, I made no secret of my belief that another finalist, Rev. Frederick D. Haynes III of Dallas, would have made a better and more dynamic leader. I still feel that way. But now that the NAACP board has decided otherwise, this is no time to walk away from our oldest civil rights organization.

Supporting the NAACP does not mean it should be above criticism, however. The idea of having an up-or-down vote on a single candidate for president - the one favored all along by Board Chair Julian Bond - rather than allowing the board to vote on all three finalists was an exercise in raw political power, not fairness. And Julian Bond's decision to lobby for having primary ballots counted in Michigan and Florida represents the first time in my memory that he has been on the wrong side of a major public policy issue.

Still, despite the asinine talk about our living in a post-civil rights or post-racial society, our major civil rights organizations are needed in this era of Jim Crow, Esquire. The National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium reports that although white men make up only 48 percent of the college-educated workforce, they hold 85 percent of the tenured college faculty positions, 86 percent of law firm partnerships, more than 90 percent of the top jobs in the news media, and 96 percent of CEO positions.

Obviously, there is still plenty of work to do. Although NAACP insiders didn't like it at the time, immediate past president Bruce Gordon did the association a favor two years ago when he revealed that contrary to the claim that the NAACP has 500,000 members - a number the group has been using since 1946, according to the Baltimore Sun - the actual figure is less than 300,000. The NAACP likes to claim their membership numbers are roughly twice that, but they arrive at that bogus conclusion by counting people that have interacted with the NAACP electronically.

As I wrote at the time of the Gordon disclosure, the low figures is a reflection on us, not the NAACP. With a black population of 38 million, there's no excuse for not having more than 1 million dues-paying members. Of course, this lack of support is not limited to the NAACP. We fail to fully support the black institutions that support us, including the Black Press.

The Census Bureau reports that there are more than 2 million blacks living in New York City. Yet, according to a report last year by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, there were only 13,175 paid subscribers to the Amsterdam News in 2006. And that represented a decline of almost 20 percent over two years.

If the NAACP is going to grow its membership under Jealous, it will need to move away from some of the antics that grab headlines, but accomplish little else. During last year's national convention in Detroit, for example, thousands of delegates participated in a mock funeral organized by the local chapter to bury the N-word. The next time there is a funeral to bury anything, we should first make sure it is dead. And the N-word is far from dead.

According to a recent study by the Parents Television Council titled, "The Rap on Rap," the dreaded N-word had to be bleeped more than any other expletive from videos studied on BET and MTV. In Greenwood, Miss., a white member of the city council sent out an e-mail recently referring to a highly respected black leader as an "ole" N-word. Not only is the N-word not dead, it is not even injured.

If there is an area that Jealous may be able to make an immediate improvement in, it will be forming coalitions with other black professional organizations. He has the contacts and inclination to bring about needed improvement in that area. The days of a civil rights organization being everything to everybody - if there was ever such a day - is over. It's time to turn to the experts in our community instead of pretending that civil rights groups have all of the answers.

There are some things the NAACP does better than any other organization. Its ACT-SO program, highlighting academic achievement, is exceptional. And the NAACP Civil Rights Report Card is an indispensable research tool for holding elected leaders accountable. Creating substantive and relevant programs is the key to bringing in new members, not resorting to gimmicks.

Ben Jealous is young, smart and committed. While he was not my first choice for the job, I'm hoping that he proves me wrong.

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## Obama's Democratic Party?

By Ron Walters

NNPA Columnist



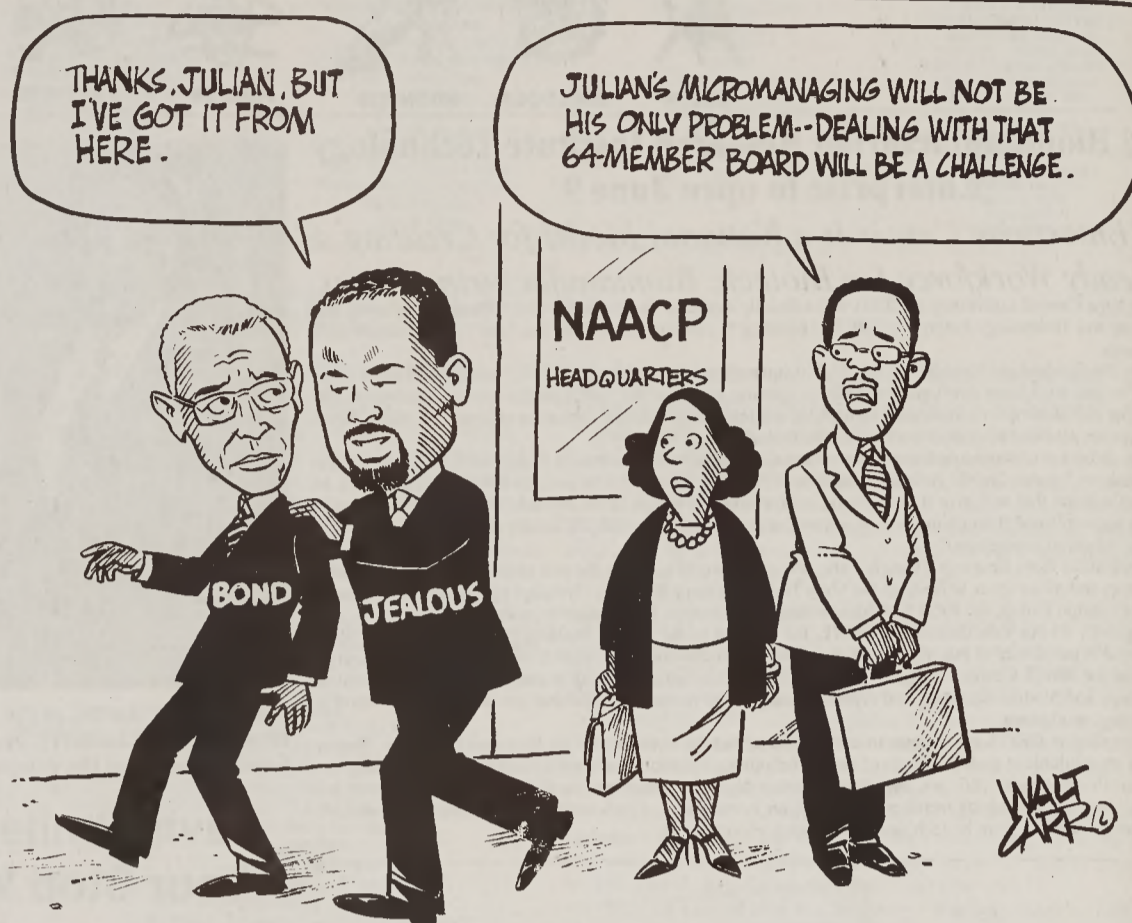
With Barack Obama about to foreclose on the Democratic Nomination for President, he will also end 16 years of Clinton leadership of the Democratic party and should he go on to win the White House, he will strengthen his control. In effect, the nomination struggle has partially been about is who would control the party apparatus that is responsible for carrying its agenda, helping to elect Democrats at other levels of government and seeding its members into the national governmental structure.

Yet, the media have missed the fact that Obama's successful campaign and his elevation as the leader of the Democratic party should be seen as resting on the shoulders of the Civil Rights movement that created the Voting Rights Act, the intervention of Fannie Lou Hamer and the Freedom Democratic party to break up a segregated convention delegations in the South; and the actions of Dick Hatcher and others to create a fair and inclusive party Charter in the 1970s.

Most important, the Jackson campaigns for president in 1984 and 1988, helped change the party's delegate selection rules, without which Obama could not have won so many delegates. Also, Jackson's themes of hope and change run through Obama's campaign and have connected not only with blacks but whites in a time of significant need and despair. By the 1988 election, Jackson had won seven million votes (600,000 of them from whites) and arrived at the 1988 Convention with over 1,200 delegates.

With this performance he became leader of the progressive wing of the Democratic party and helped Ron Brown to become the first black Democratic party Chair.

Ronald Reagan had helped to successfully create the notion that the Democratic party was the party of blacks and this inference led many whites into the Republican party. Therefore, when Bill Clinton seized control of the Democratic party as its nominee in 1992, his campaign initiated the kind of the racial politics we see now, by executing a black mentally challenged convict Ricky Ray Rector and criticizing rap singer Sister Souljah at Rev. Moon's convention in January of that year. (Continued On Page 15)



## A Helping Hand for Haiti

By U. S. Rep. Kendrick Meek (D-Fla.)

NNPA Special Commentary

In light of the recent worldwide food price increases, Haiti is facing an acute economic crisis. Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and is just 700 miles off the coast of my home state of Florida. As Americans, and especially as African-Americans, we must come to the aid of the Haitian people.

In Haiti, where the typical Haitian makes \$2 a day, the increase in food prices is unsustainable for the typical Haitian. In addition to the food price crisis, Haiti suffers from a high percentage of joblessness, which results in persistent poverty. During my 11 trips to Haiti since my election to Congress in 2002, I have observed firsthand the obstacles Haiti must overcome to revitalize their economy. For me, and my South Florida constituents, this is an issue which concerns us deeply.

During my most recent trip to Haiti on April 20 and 21, I met with Haitian President Rene Preval, U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Janet Sanderson and representatives from the international community. President Preval and I discussed ways to provide humanitarian assistance to the Haitian people. The President has determined that over the next six months, Haiti requires: 30,000 metric tons of rice (4 percent broken quality) per month; 15,000 metric tons of wheat per month; and 7,000 tons of cooking oil per month.

Upon my return from Haiti on April 22, 2008 I wrote a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush urging him to allocate to Haiti at least \$15 million in direct monetary assistance from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, which helps nations facing surging food prices. In addition, letters were written to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and U.S. Agency for International Development Director Henrietta H. Fore explaining the importance of the U.S. involvement in providing humanitarian support for the country.

Haiti has many strong supporters in the U.S. Congress, especially within the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Members of the CBC traveled to Haiti in mid-May on a fact finding mission and have returned with an increased sense of commitment to assist Haiti. Already we as a Caucus are taking the lead in urging the international community to provide immediate debt relief to the Haitian government. This year, Haiti will send \$48.7 million in debt payments to multilateral financial institutions. That money can be better spent to assist the Haitian people.

And, the CBC has also renewed its support for granting Haitians residing in the United States Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a temporary immigration status. TPS may be granted when any of the following conditions are met: there is ongoing armed conflict posing a serious threat to personal safety; it is requested by a foreign state that temporarily cannot handle the return of nationals due to environmental disaster; or when extraordinary and temporary conditions in a foreign state exist which prevent aliens from returning.

On May 15, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encourage Act of 2008 (HOPE II). HOPE II is vital legislation which expands trade preferences to Haiti. Humanitarian assistance for Haiti in the short run is critical, but creating jobs by revitalizing the Haitian economy in the long run is essential.

The international community is playing a vital role in stabilizing Haiti, but ultimately it is Haitians who need to rebuild their economy by developing homegrown industries, and HOPE II gives Haitians that opportunity.

The Congressional Black Caucus is actively working and advocating on behalf of Haiti in the U.S. Congress. We have remained engaged on this subject long before the current situation in Haiti began garnering worldwide attention, and we will remain engaged for the indefinite future.

U.S. Rep. Kendrick B. Meek represents the 17th Congressional District of Florida which includes parts of Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. He serves on the House Committee on Armed Services and is the lone Floridian sitting on the House Committee on Ways and Means.

## The Continuum of Black Leadership in America

By Gary L. Flowers

NNPA Columnist

The continuum of leadership in black America has been rooted in competence, apprenticeship, vision, and timing. This week's announcement by the National Association for the Advancement Colored People (NAACP) of Ben Jealous as its new president is no different. From Nubia to now, leadership in the black community does not emanate by accident. A study of Ancient Egypt reveals that pharaohs, priests, and generals were well prepared to lead. The Biblical account of Moses' life began with the timing of being pulled from a river and placed in a palace; the vision of "the promised land" for his people; the apprenticeship and years of study as a priest in the Mystery System of Ancient Egypt; and the competence and faith to lead people. Modern African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah (Sacred Theology), Jomo Kenyatta (Medicine), and Nelson Mandela (Law) were professionally well-trained in addition to their life of social activism and national leadership. Throughout the continuum of black leadership, whether Joshua, King Tut, or a young 26-year old PhD named Martin Luther King, Jr., age has never been litmus for leadership.

Within the black community, and the world at-large, exists a liberal sprinkling of old fools and young wise men and women. One hundred years after W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida B. Well-Barnett moved the Niagara Movement into the NAACP, the ascendancy of a 35-year old journalist/activist/philanthropist to the highest office should be applauded. While young leaders do not replace older ones, but compliment the leadership continuum, it is timely that Ben Jealous brings a fresh vision to the NAACP. Born in California, and trained at Columbia University and Oxford University his academic preparation is strong. Serving as the executive director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association has afforded Jealous with a pulse of the people's priorities.

While naysayers within and without the black community decry the efficacy and effectiveness of black leadership, Ben Jealous and the phalanx of "forty and thirty-something-year olds" in leadership positions is a statement to the future of black leadership. Beginning with those reported to be finalist of the NAACP top job of Reverend Frederick Haynes (47) and Alvin Brown (37). Within the Black Leadership Forum are: Marc Morial (48) of the National Urban League; Hazel Trice Edney of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (47); Nicole Lee of TransAfrica (32); Melanie Campbell of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (41); Reverend Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus (37); John Hope Bryant of Operation Hope (40); and Jennifer Jones (40) of the National Pan-Hellenic Association. The legacy of leadership in the black community is institutional and individual. As a new cadre of committed young, gifted, and black men and women compliment existing leaders in national organizations, leadership begins in individuals, trained and prepared to lead.

Gary Flowers is executive director and CEO of the Black Leadership Forum. He is 45 years old.