

The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 88 - NUMBER 26

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, JULY 4, 2009

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 30



The North Carolina Legislative Black Caucus Foundation, Inc held its 23rd annual Education Scholarship Weekend June 19-20 at the at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center, Research Triangle Park. From left to right are NCCU Chancellor Charlie Nelms; Erskine Bowles president of the multi-campus University of North Carolina ; Rep. H.M. "Mickey" Michaux-Durham; and Rep. Alma Adams-Guilford, chair of the Legislative Black Caucus. See photos on page 2. (Photo by Lawson)

Michael's Shortcomings in No Way Equaled His Strengths

By Rev. Al Sharpton
NNPA Columnist

(NNPA) - It was the mid-1970s. The nation was fresh off the heels of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War was finally over and people began adjusting to a newly, fully integrated society. Blacks and whites worked side by side, and women and minorities slowly but surely began to crack open that all too visible glass ceiling in triumphant ways.

NEWS ANALYSIS

As society progressed however, we waited - and yearned - for that one individual who could break the mold in mainstream pop culture and truly make it acceptable to not just speak of equality in all endeavors but transform it into an actuality. We awaited someone who defied racial impediments and institutional barriers, and could finally normalize African-Americans onto television sets and into living rooms across the country. That someone who possessed enough raw talent that even the most discriminatory of individuals could not help but respect and acknowledge his or her sheer gift.

Little did we know then that the youngest member of the Jackson 5 was about to revamp our complete social, political and entertainment structure in unfathomable ways, and in the process, reshape the perception of an entire race on the world stage.

I was a young teenager when I first met Michael. We were both blessed to have known the late great Godfather of soul James Brown, who, in many respects, was like a surrogate father to us both. Throughout the decades, we formed a close kinship that many may never be able to comprehend. During his 1984 Victory Tour, Michael and I began working together as I took on the role of his community relations director. In 2002, the King of Pop came to our National Action Network headquarters in Harlem, and he and I marched together to Sony Music along with hundreds of supporters as we fought for Michael's ownership of his own music catalogue. And during his tough trials and legal bouts throughout the years, I openly supported Michael - and that itself will never change.

I was one of the lucky few to have known this Apollo legend and bear witness to not only an exceptional career, but to a compassionate, determined, driven individual whose greatest qualities are often underscored. A man who dominated the charts with sales of some 50 million copies of his "Thriller" album alone, but who never forgot his humble roots of Gary, Indiana. He was an incomparable artist, dancer and entertainer who dazzled audiences on every corner of the planet, and still created and participated in countless charities.

Penning humanistic, moving lyrics like "We Are The World" and "Man In The Mirror", Michael took his message well beyond the TV sets of America. He was a true groundbreaker who paved the way for many of today's artists who often imitate his signature style, and a man who relentlessly opened endless doors for African-Americans to be acceptable idols around the world. During the 1980s, music channel MTV refused to play videos by black musicians, but it was Michael's undeniable talent that won him heavy rotation for years to come.

We as African-Americans and people of all races as a whole owe a tremendous debt to Michael Jackson. He not only set the standard for excellence in entertainment, but maintained a positive outlook despite all his trials and tribulations. And in his sheer existence, he

(Continued On Page 15)



MEETING JAMES BROWN - James Brown, The Godfather of Soul and Michael Jackson.

Jackson's complex color story transcended race

By Jesse Washington

Michael Jackson had a complicated relationship with his blackness. In 40 years in the public eye, Jackson's skin lightened, his hair changed from Afro to bone-straight perm, and his wide nose was surgically whittled down to a point. His music went from R&B to pure pop and beyond. His close friends included Elizabeth Taylor and Nancy Reagan.

By the time his last smash hit, "Black or White," was released in 1991, many people wondered if the song title applied to Jackson himself. But those who knew him well say he always maintained his black identity. And as a trailblazer for a new breed of global multimedia stars, he helped create an era in which race was a piece, rather than the definition, of a person.

"I think that Michael really, in his career, just transcended race. His work and his life was sort of about undefining race," said Bill Bottrell, who co-produced "Black or White" and worked closely with Jackson from 1986 into the early '90s.

"He obscured the issue, or obscured it at least as far as he was concerned, or just transcended the issue," Bottrell said. "I watched him with his friends, they came from all walks of life. He certainly surrounded himself with lots of African-Americans, also a lot of white people, including me."

Jackson grew up in hardscrabble Gary, Ind., performing with his brothers. The Jackson 5 were weaned on rhythm and blues, a name coined in the 1940s to describe the fusion of several black music styles with a new instrument, the electric bass.

The first Jackson 5 album was released in 1969 on the Motown label, which carved a place in history by making black music "safe" for white people to enjoy. Jackson was an instant child star. In 1975 he moved to Epic Records, a division of CBS, and hit the solo stratosphere in 1979 with his album "Off The Wall," an irresistible combination of funk and pop music.

It sold 9 million copies, the most by any black performer up to that point. On the album cover, Jackson has a puffy Afro, and his skin is slightly darker than the brick wall behind him.

"There really were two phases to the career of Michael Jackson," said the commentator and community activist Earl Ofari Hutchinson.

"There certainly was a relationship with and an identification with African-Americans - music, dance, lifestyle, his performances," he said. "That was essentially black music. That was, quote-unquote, the black Michael Jackson."

His next album was 1982's "Thriller," the biggest record of all time, which has sold 50 million copies worldwide. He was the first black artist to get video play on the fledgling MTV network, and became one of the most famous people on the planet - of any race.

"He was beyond a skin color. It was about the message in his music. That's why people related to him," said DJ Spinna, who produces parties in the United States and internationally showcasing Jackson's music.

Yet the wider Michael Jackson's fame spread, the whiter his appearance became.

Jackson said he had vitiligo, a disease that produces white splotches on the skin. He compensated with treatments and makeup that turned his overall complexion lighter and lighter, to an extent never seen before in a black celebrity. Serial surgeries kept altering his facial features.

Successful blacks - from Sammy Davis to Oprah Winfrey to Barack Obama - have often been accusing of losing touch with their roots. But Jackson also had to contend with historic changes in the music industry:

(Continued On Page 15)

Republicans: Will Sotomayor uphold Constitution?

By Laurie Kellman

WASHINGTON (AP) - Senate Republicans on June 23 unveiled a new narrative ahead of Sonia Sotomayor's confirmation hearings, questioning her commitment to constitutional guarantees on the right to keep and bear arms and equal treatment under the law regardless of race or gender.

The senior Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee even questioned whether Sotomayor sufficiently opposes terrorism, citing what he said was the "extensive work" she had done for a group formerly named the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. If confirmed, Sotomayor would be the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice.

"This is a group that has taken some very shocking positions with respect to terrorism," Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama said.

Sessions said the group, now called Latino Justice PRLDEF, in 1990 came to the defense of Puerto Rican nationalists who 36 years earlier had wounded five lawmakers during an attack on the House while it was in session.

Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy of Vermont said PRLDEF is a mainstream group modeled on the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People used its legal defense group to file lawsuits to bar racial discrimination.

In multiple public and private speeches June 23, Republican senators began weaving a few select themes through their remarks and stepped carefully around others that could alienate constituencies Sotomayor represents. Without enough votes to filibuster or stop Sotomayor's confirmation to the Supreme Court, Republicans have few tools even to slow it down.

The Republican messaging from now through the confirmation hearings beginning July 13 includes issues popular among conservatives: Sotomayor's commitment to Second Amendment gun rights, her opinions on whether the Fifth Amendment protects against public taking of property without just compensation and on the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

Sotomayor worked with the legal defense and education fund in 1990 when New York Mayor David Dinkins called the nationalist attackers "assassins," and a Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund official said Dinkins' terminology was insensitive.

"The president of the organization continued explaining, that for many people in Puerto Rico, these men were fighters for freedom and justice," Sessions said June 23. "So, I wonder if she agreed with that statement and if she agreed that the mayor of New York's comments were insensitive?"

Republicans said they have clarified their strategy in recent days by documents Sotomayor has turned over to the Judiciary Committee in advance of her confirmation hearings. But it was clear that with only seven Republicans on the 18-member panel and Hispanics and women already wary of Republicans, the party needs to tread carefully with any outright criticism of the first Latina nominated to the high court.

Democrats and Sotomayor supporters, meanwhile, scoffed at the notion that Republicans could stop or slow Sotomayor on substantive grounds, given her American dream background, Ivy League education and record as a federal judge.

"It has become clearer and clearer as we look at her record and vast experience that attacking this nominee is like throwing rocks at a library," said Sen. Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat. "It's uncalled for and it doesn't accomplish anything. Her opponents are grasping at straws."

"There's only one thing that can stop her and that is politics," said Art Acevedo, chief of police in Austin, Texas, and president of the National Latino Peace Officers Association, which endorsed Sotomayor on June 23.

But Republicans said they had substantive questions for Sotomayor.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn, a member of the Judiciary Committee and chairman of the Republican Senate campaign committee, said he wants to know more about "whether Americans can count on her to uphold one of the fundamental liberties enshrined in the bill of rights: The right to keep and bear arms."

From the Second Amendment, Cornyn said he would move on to the Fifth - whether the government may take property from one person and give it to another, "based on some elastic definition of public use." Finally, Cornyn said he would move on to her thoughts on the equal protection clause in the 14th Amendment.

Republicans also want to know more about whether Sotomayor would hew to the Constitution and the law in her rulings or also employ the empathy that President Barack Obama said he wants in a justice on the high court. Sotomayor has told senators that a justice must ultimately and completely follow the law.

Sotomayor's comment that she hoped a "wise Latina" would come to better decisions than those who had lived other lives gets right at the empathy question. But Republicans are chastened by the public outrage that resulted when conservative commentators said that comment made Sotomayor a racist in reverse - then reversed themselves and backed off.

Instead, look for Republicans to say merely that the "wise Latina" concerns them - and then pivot to ask more broadly about her "judicial philosophy."

"As we consider this nomination, I'll continue to examine her record to see if personal or political views have influenced her judgment," Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said on the Senate floor.

That was all before lunch. Republicans then retired behind closed doors for their weekly policy session. There, Sen. Jon Kyl, the Republican whip, joined Sessions and Cornyn in a discussion of the party's strategy leading up to the hearings.

The leaders emerged describing the strategy as allowing her to explain "whether she's truly committed to colorblind justice."

On the Net:

Senate Judiciary Committee: <http://judiciary.senate.gov>