

# National

## Historic Unity among Leaders at Congressional Black Caucus

WASHINGTON (AP) — The grassroots, spiritual, middle-class and political standard-bearers of black America overcame their long-time disagreements and came together last week.

During the annual meeting of the Congressional Black Caucus, Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan, NAACP Executive Director Benjamin Chavis and Rep. Kweisi Mfume shared the spotlight without rancor or criticism.

"That was something very impressive," said Peggy Chapman, a 22-year-old rapper called Tragedy who had the type of childhood that would earn him such a name. "I'm tired of seeing us flip on each other, and character-assassinate each other in public."

Yet, tragedy found faith when, before his eyes, the black political figures who say they repre-

sent people like him actually sat down and hashed out the differences that have kept them apart.

Chapman, a member of a panel on rap music at the caucus, intentionally had stayed away from the leaders' session, believing it would deteriorate into a public black family feud. He watched it on television in his hotel room and saw what seemed to him a dream come true.

Last Thursday morning, Chavis and Jackson stood in a holding room. Chavis seemed edgy and skeptical, while the usually smooth Jackson, a two-time presidential candidate, looked like he wanted to bolt.

The source of their anxiety was Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam. He had come to claim his place alongside mainstream black power brokers. But Farrakhan and

Jackson were on the outs, over anti-Semitic comments and political differences of opinion.

And Chavis was sore at Farrakhan for news articles condemning him and others for denying the Muslim minister a chance to speak at the 30th anniversary March on Washington last month.

"It's time to have a full airing, now," Chavis said. "Hopefully, there will be greater clarity on the renewed importance of challenging racial injustice."

At one point, Farrakhan started, then cut off, an attack on Jackson, who said black Americans have been winning the battle against racism since passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which struck down legal segregation.

"Reverend Jackson, I submit on one hand we're winning," Farrakhan said. "Ignorance is the worst



Jessie Jackson

enemy of the rise of our people. That ignorance is fed by corrupt leadership. ... We've got to unite at the top to develop strategies to free our people."

Then Farrakhan glowingly

praised Jackson as a brave man, a loyal friend and someone he loves. "The media does not want a united Farrakhan and Jackson," he said.

Jackson sat quietly through Farrakhan's praise and the wild applause it brought. Then he said: "That's precisely why leaders, knowing the nature of media, must speak to policy and direction."

Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., fought her way onto the panel dominated by men. "I'm a black woman. I'm a sister," Waters said. "There is a concentrated, organized effort to keep our voices down on the discussion of race."

Chavis apologized to Farrakhan for the march mishap — and asked for an apology in return. They decided to work it out in private.

"The question is, Will we

have mutual respect for our different perspectives?" Chavis asked. "We need to work together more than we've ever worked together."

"I just do not want the forces we must fight to get off the hook cheap," Jackson said. "Oppressors do not have a retirement plan. The oppressed must change their minds. We must stop the fratricide."

"Only in unity can we end racism from a power perspective," Farrakhan added. "We don't have to sit around begging white people to do for us what we can do for ourselves."

Mfume, a Democratic congressman from Maryland who heads the black caucus, capped the day by declaring his 40-member group would work jointly with Farrakhan on legislative matters. "This is a new day in many respects," he said.

## Success of White Students Amplified, Test Results Show

RALEIGH (AP) — National exam results show that North Carolina's black students are competitive with black students nationwide. However, the state's white students finish well behind other whites in the nation, the test results show.

"It is something we have realized for some time now, but it is difficult for people to grasp the implications," said Suzanne Triplett, the assistant state superintendent who oversees North Carolina's testing program. "In effect, it means we tend to inflate the grades of white students more often and don't challenge them as we should. That makes it very difficult for them to compete nationally."

The gap is evident when the results of national exams are broken down by race. It confounds a popular notion that North Carolina's rankings can be attributed to its large population of poor blacks and rural students. The state has one of the highest percentages of rural resi-

dents in the country and ranks 16th in its percentage of minority enrollment.

But the test results suggest that it is white students who find it most difficult to compete nationally, primarily because they aren't working hard enough for the grades they receive, educators say. In math and reading exams, for example, North Carolina black students easily reach the national average for blacks. White students' scores, however, lag behind the national average for white students by about 10 points.

While they are doing better against blacks in other states, North Carolina's black students on average still score well below white students on all national exams.

College officials who see the competitive difference stress the need for improvement among both races.

"It's important to recognize how individual groups are performing, but you have to be careful about drawing conclusions," said Lloyd

"Vic" Hackley, chancellor of Fayetteville State University. "North Carolina's black students are more competitive, and I notice that here, but the gap is still dramatic between blacks and whites. And eventually, everyone competes against each other."

The pattern of black and white achievement repeated itself several times this year when national test scores were released for elementary and high school students. North Carolina's black eighth-graders, for example, scored two points above the average of blacks nationwide on a math test released in April — a ranking of 18th in the country. North Carolina's whites scored 10 points below whites nationwide on the same test — a ranking of 33rd.

The state's black students scored 19 points behind the national average for blacks when SAT results were released in August. Whites scored 34 points behind whites nationwide.

Blacks from North Carolina scored three points above blacks nationwide when results of the national reading test were released last week. North Carolina's white students scored three points below white students nationwide.

It isn't clear when the state's black students started to become competitive among blacks nationally, but their current standing is an obvious improvement over the past.

In the early 1970s, state officials found North Carolina's blacks were roughly two academic years behind blacks nationwide — far more than whites at the time, said Bill Brown, director of accountability services for the state Department of Public Instruction.

Triplett offers two possible reasons for the disproportionate gains.

First is a trend among teachers to inflate grades of those who are given A's and B's on their report card — a group that is predominantly white. When those students take a national test, they find it difficult to keep pace with students in other states who had to work harder for their top grades.

The second reason is the effect of state and federal programs during the past two decades. Most have focused primarily on the lowest performing students — a group that contains a large percentage of the state's blacks.

As their basic skills improved, they became more competitive at the national level.

Teachers hired with federal Chapter 1 money have spent hours drilling disadvantaged students on basic math and reading skills. While

the \$6 billion program is being revamped after heavy criticism about its effectiveness, it's clear that some children were helped. Triplett said.

"There's a difference between an inefficient program and a total failure," she said.

Still, state educators see the competitive level of North Carolina's black students as a stepping stone in a long journey to improve all scores.

"What has happened with our black students represents progress, but it is not enough," said Henry Johnson, the assistant state superintendent who oversees North Carolina's classroom curriculum. "All of our students can exceed the national average if we do our jobs. It's a matter of having the will to do it."



Miss South Carolina, Kimberly Clarice Aiken, left, reacts after she has realized she has become the Miss America 1994 in Atlantic City, N.J. At right, first runner-up, Miss Georgia, Kara Martin.

## Family, Friends Say New Miss America is Humble and Talented

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Kimberly Aiken is still a teen-ager, but she can easily handle her responsibilities as the new Miss America, her mother says.

"She's poised, calm and has her head screwed on right, especially when she's trying to help people," Aiken's mother, Valerie said Sunday.

Valerie Aiken didn't think her daughter would win as an 18-year-old, but she thinks judges were impressed by the Columbia resident's maturity and elegance.

Maturity and elegance had nothing to do with the reaction of

Aiken's dormitory cheering section at her former school, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

"Some of us were hanging out of the window screaming, 'Go Kim! Go Kim!' Everybody's so shocked she got it, but we all knew she could do it," said Kendra Pough, 18, Aiken's classmate at St. Andrews Middle School and Columbia High School.

Columbia High chorus teacher Conchita Edens, one of Aiken's vocal coaches, said she is still trying to come down from the excitement of seeing her humble and kind pupil win.

"She has never been one to

want to seek all of the glory. And that voice of hers, I tell you, it's heavenly — God sent," Edens said.

Kimberly Aiken's boyfriend of 11 months, Louis Barber, whom she met while at school in Charlotte, said he was overwhelmed when he realized his girlfriend is Miss America.

"I had to sit down," Barber said. "I felt fainty."

Columbia Mayor Bob Coble planned Sunday to send Aiken a telegram of congratulations.

Although the date has not been set, Aiken's homecoming will be declared "Kimberly Aiken Day" in Columbia, Coble said.

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