

OPINION

Letters to the Editor

THE CHRONICLE

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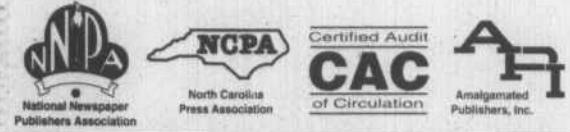


Photo by Zuma Press
 Michael Jackson rides to Sony headquarters in New York atop a double-decker bus. He is holding an unflattering sign depicting the head of Sony Music, Tommy Mottola.

It now matters whether you are black or white.

Michael Jackson, "the King of Pop," has been in the news a lot this week as a result of a strange news conference he held in New York City flanked by the Rev. Al Sharpton and legal eagle Johnnie Cochran. Jackson is joining the two men in a new coalition that will apparently fight for the rights of African-American recording artists, who Jackson says are taken advantage of by recording industry honchos.



Sharpton

Jackson emphasizes that point by calling the head of his record label, Sony Music's Tommy Mottola, a racist "nigger" to identify one of the black artists on the Sony label.

It is debatable whether Jackson has all of a sudden become a civil rights activist, or if he, as many have claimed, is just upset about owing Sony millions of dollars and wants out of his contract. At this point, the latter seems more probable.

After all, this was the man who said it doesn't matter whether you are "black or white" and took that message to the top of the pop charts.

Jackson may have valid concerns about Mottola and the way black artists are treated, and Sharpton and Cochran may think those concerns are grave enough for them to intervene. But there are bigger fish to fry. Jackson, by many accounts, still is a very wealthy man. He can afford to take his disagreements with his record company to a court of law; he can afford to fight Mottola.

There are millions of other blacks in this country that cannot, people who can't draw media organizations from around the world to address their concerns. Sharpton and Cochran would be better served helping these people. Of course, the spotlight would not be nearly as bright.

If Sharpton is serious about running for president in 2004, he should return to fighting for issues of the common man — issues that involve blatant racism against blue-collar workers and poor blacks.

Jackson, who, to our knowledge, has never stepped up to the plate for civil rights before, should be left to his own devices.

Thanks for supporting Roundtable anniversary

To the Editor:
 On behalf of members of the Black Leadership Roundtable of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, and co-conveners Rep. Larry Womble and Khalid Griggs, we wish to thank the Winston-Salem community for coming out to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Black Leadership Roundtable on June 20.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our successes with the community. We also appreciate the community's support of the work of the Roundtable, and we invite the community to attend Roundtable workshops, seminars, and events that may be held during the year. Again, thank you, Winston-Salem.

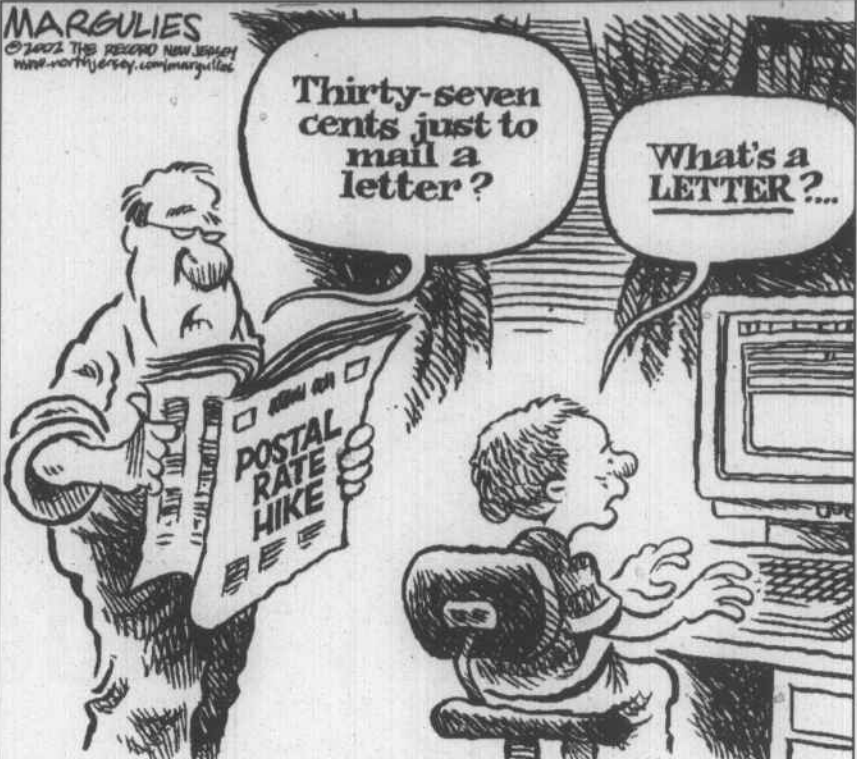
Irene Phillips
 Chairperson, Anniversary Committee
 Black Leadership Roundtable

Let's vote on a lottery

To the Editor:
 Some well-meaning people have attacked the character and motives of those of us who support the right to vote on the N.C. lottery. May I explain why I started five years ago petitioning for a lottery referendum?

In 1997, a few politicians in Winston-Salem and Greensboro were trying to force the taxpayers to pay for a baseball stadium, so the Minnesota Twins could move to the Triad.

I felt that the team's owners



were using the threat of relocation to blackmail the taxpayers of Minnesota to build a new baseball stadium. If they didn't, the Twins would pack up their balls and bats and go south to the Triad!

The politicians at first tried to raise taxes on beer and wine to pay for the stadium. But the liquor industry has a lot of clout with our lawmakers!

Then a food tax on prepared meals was proposed. Every time a family goes to their favorite restaurant, or grabs a burger for lunch, they'd subsidize the proposed stadium.

I thought this new tax was

coercive and unfair to working people and low-income people. So I started petitions for a lottery, as a voluntary alternative to the restaurant tax. No tax is fun, but at least you choose whether you want to buy a lottery ticket!

Over the next several years I printed thousands of petitions at my own expense and dropped them off at hundreds of gas stations, restaurants, ice cream parlors and convenience stores throughout North Carolina.

Thanks to all the good, hard-working people who collected 6,000 signatures on our "People for the Lottery" petitions! I delivered the big stack of peti-

tions to the General Assembly last year, as one of a handful of people who testified in favor of the right to vote on the lottery.

The General Assembly will decide next week on whether to have a referendum on the lottery.

Please tell your local officials and your state legislators that you deserve the right to vote, to make your own decision on the lottery!

Our forefathers and our veterans fought, bled, and died for our freedom. Let's use it!

Sincerely,
 Gary James Minter
 Founder and volunteer,
 People for the Lottery

Martha's stewardship



James Clingman
 Guest Columnist

I write a lot about stewardship and how we should apply it in our daily lives; I also have written a considerable amount on liars, cheats and thieves, when it comes to the bastions of capitalism such as the stock market, banks, insurance companies, and savings and loans. Do you remember the article titled "Enron's End Run"? Well, now we have WorldCom and 17,000 workers thrown into the streets by this company, whose leaders lied, cheated and stole their way to temporal riches. And to top it all off, there is the Miss Martha (Stewart) connection. What did she know, and when did she know it?

You know, it's almost comical to hear the latest "shocking" revelation about the possibility (and some say the probability) that dear Martha may be involved in yet another huge rip-off by the elitists of this country. While I don't know a great deal about Miss Martha and her empire, and really don't care to know, it is intriguing to hear all of the news reports concerning her alleged collusion in the WorldCom insider trading scandal. I don't understand why so many people virtually worshipped her in the first place and bought all of her "stuff." But, those same folks are now jumping on the Get-Martha bandwagon, saying they hate her and they are showing it by causing her company now to suffer a tremendous loss in the value of its stock. As the old television show said, "People are funny."

This debacle reminds me of stewardship and what it means to be a good steward of the resources God gives you. Miss Martha, if she is guilty of wrongdoing, has lost millions of dollars because she cared so much about saving a measly \$200,000. Her stewardship leaves a lot to be desired if she is that greedy and short-sighted. How much money does she need anyway? How much does she want?



File Photo
 Cooking and crafts guru Martha Stewart has been making headlines for something other than her cookies and wreaths lately. The feds are looking into Stewart's timely selling of stock that was about to go belly up.

Despite the mounting evidence against Miss Martha, a top-level executive for Forbes Magazine, in a recent interview on Fox News, said we should leave Martha Stewart alone. After all, it was only a small amount of money, and it is not important enough for us to spend time discussing. In other words, if she broke the law, we should just wink at her and move on. I wonder if he would say the same thing about others who break the law, especially if they don't have as much "jack" as Miss Martha. It's funny how the rich stick together. If those of us who are less fortunate would stick together half as much, we'd be in really good shape.

An interesting aspect of this money madness is the new black love affair with the stock market and the current hoopla being promulgated regarding how many black folks own shares of stock. At a time when billions are being stolen from the market, some of us are bragging about how good it is to finally be in the game. Some of our leaders are telling us to invest more of our hard-earned money in the stock market and to ride out the rough period we are in right now. And blacks are doing just that, according

to the latest reports. Martha Stewart, a mega-millionaire, is yelling, "Sell! Sell!" while black folks are saying "Buy! Buy! Stay in! Stay in!" Black folks are the group that can least afford to lose our money on the market or anywhere else. Go figure.

I say black folks should place a greater emphasis on investing in ourselves and the businesses owned by our people, in addition to the blue chips. Instead of continuing to make everyone else rich, like the Martha Stewarts of the world, we must invest in ourselves and create and retain wealth for our children. How much more do we need to see before we change our tactics? How many Enrons and WorldComs do we need to experience before we turn inward and start doing for ourselves?

The bottom line is this: so-called insiders are lying, stealing, cheating and ripping off the markets every day. Do you really believe that an executive who knows his company is about to be sold or has been cooking the books does not tell someone in his family or his closest friends? Do you really believe insider trading does not go on every day in this country and around the world? How do you think the rich stay

that way? Why do you think those folks are always clapping and cheering at the closing bell of the New York Stock Exchange, even if it has been a bear of a day? C'mon, brothers and sisters, let's get real.

My guess is that Miss Martha will not do one day in prison if she is convicted of acts of unjust stewardship. After this blows over, we will return to our state euphoria and wait for the next crisis to come so we can have something to talk about. We will either go back to buying Martha's sheets and everything else she makes, or we will find another hero or heroine to worship. I hope we don't miss the lesson on stewardship, however, because Martha's stewardship is one for the books.

James E. Clingman, an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African-American studies department, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald Newspaper and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce. He hosts the radio program "Blackonomics" and is the author of the book "Economic Empowerment or Economic Enslavement — We Have a Choice."

Submit letters and columns to:
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