

OPINION

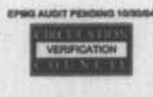
THE CHRONICLE

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Johnnie Cochran at a book signing in the late '90s. File Photo

Who will replace Cochran?



Ralph C. Watkins
Guest Columnist

Who will replace the giant of a man who is best known to the world for defending O. J. Simpson but when you look at his record he was much bigger than O.J.

Johnnie Cochran gave his life to doing what was right.

He represented the best in the African-American community.

He began his career as a deputy city attorney in Los Angeles after finishing his education at UCLA and Loyola Marymount University. He then moved on to find his purpose and to serve his people. His purpose was to secure our civil rights and to fight to make the justice system more just.

Many of the names we don't know will remember Mr. Cochran for his sacrifice and willingness to give back. Of all the celebrity cases he had he also had twice as many cases from those we would consider no-name people. People who were down and out but needed someone on their side Mr. Cochran was that man. His reputation in the Los Angeles area was not about his celebrity status but rather it was about his service status.

Mr. Cochran was from the old school - the school that taught that you didn't get yours and forget about us. The old school believed that you got yours because of us and we need you to come back, help us, be with us, work with us, serve us and develop the next you. This is what Mr. Cochran did.

As a faithful Christian he served his God by serving God's people. His greatest contributions were in the areas of civil rights for African-Americans.

Legend has it that Mr. Cochran gave advice to lawyers on civil rights cases throughout the nation. He wasn't a big shot who couldn't be touched but rather he was the big shot with the common touch.

He never forgot his Southern roots. He never forgot racism of Louisiana as he and his family moved west looking for a better life. His life was lived by working to change a world while changing himself. He was a father; a husband; a race man; a community man; a giver, not a taker; a servant, not a saint; a fighter; and a lover.

Who will replace the men and women like Mr. Cochran? As members of our greatest generation go into their twilight years will the next generation wake up? We live in a society that is increasingly succumbing to the pressures of consumerism.

When I talk to my students about serving the community I get a blank stare. So many of my students think they have made it by themselves and they are quick to say, "I don't owe nobody nothing."

Oh, how wrong and misguided they are. I do my best, like so many parents, professors, teachers and preachers, to tell them otherwise. We wouldn't be where we are today if we were not for men and women like Mr. Cochran. We have to work to develop the next generation of community servant leaders.

As the likes of Mr. Cochran go home to be with the Lord these questions come to mind: Who will serve the Lord in this age? Who will lead the fight to secure our civil rights? Who will emerge from generation next?

Dr. Ralph Watkins is a sociology professor at Augusta State University and the president of Unity Council Inc. He can be reached via his Web site: www.ralphwatkins.org

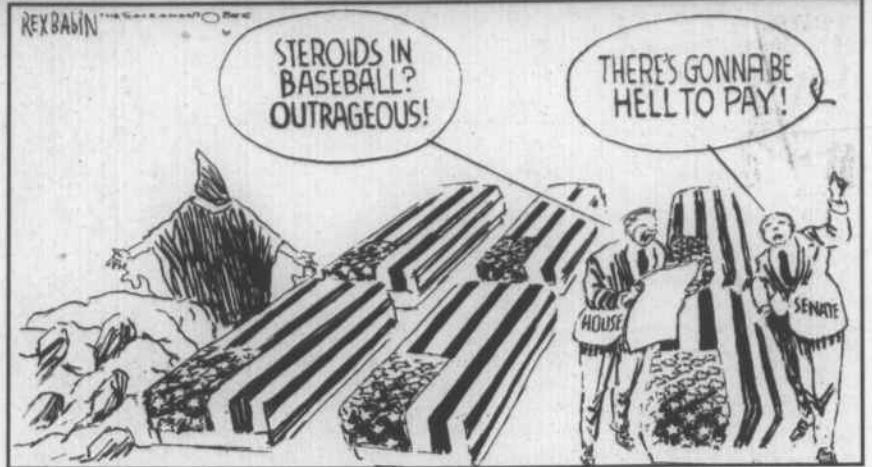
Bond meeting

To the Editor:

On April 6 at 7:30 p.m. Dellabrook Presbyterian Church, CHANGE and the Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem will hold an education house meeting at Dellabrook, 115 Dellabrook Road. The purpose of this house meeting is twofold.

First, we want to hear what parents, students, teachers, administrators and other concerned citizens think about education in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. Second, we want to share with all who come the Ministers Conference position paper of opposition to any bond referendum for this county's schools in 2005.

When The Chronicle made our position public a couple of weeks ago, one school board member was quoted as essentially stating that anyone who opposes this bond is anti-child and anti-education. We find this position to be absurd because no one supports children and education more than the church. The bulk of the school fund-raising, scholarship offers and school volunteering in the black community is led by Christian mem-



bers and ministers.

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system is around 53 percent black and brown (40 percent African-American and 13 percent Hispanic/Latino). Yet the school board (seven of its nine members are white Republicans) has nearly completely resegregated the district, and the board is asking for \$80 million to go to Walkertown.

In 1995, the school board created an Equity Committee to see that the newly resegregated

schools got the same access to quality education as the predominantly white affluent schools. The Equity Committee said Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools should assign students like Wake County, where the African-American superintendent, Bill McNeal, says he wants no school with more than 45 percent poor children or 40 percent of children below grade level. This has led to a desegregated Wake County School system and would also desegregate Winston-

Salem/Forsyth.

The Ministers Conference doesn't see giving \$80 million more to a system consistently under-serving, ill serving and miseducating black and brown children, thereby compounding and exacerbating the inequities that already exist.

Come to Dellabrook Church April 6 at 7:30 p.m. and let us reason together.

Dr. Carlton A.G. Eversley

Preying on the poor



Ernie Pitt
This & That

It should be no wonder that most of the payday lending companies operate mostly within the African-American community. Someone once asked a bank robber why he robbed the bank. He answered, quite matter-of-factly, "That's where the money is."

Payday lenders take that same attitude when it comes to our community. As I mentioned in my last column, African-Americans in this state alone spent \$32.5 billion on goods and services last year. That's a lot of frijoles. I can't understand why that simple

fact is so hard for us to grasp. Since we have all of this money, why are we so impoverished?

I think a big part of the problem is that we find it difficult to do business with each other. And, when we do happen to do business with one of our own and get a raw deal, we tend to condemn every black business in the world instead of just the one who did us in.

Funny thing, too, we don't do that when someone who doesn't look like us rips us off. We simply go and find another one to spend our money with.

We really need to check that. We shouldn't condemn everybody for something one business may have done. We deserve better treatment from each other. We have to learn how to forgive rather than condemn. Really, that's what it amounts to. I know it's a hard thing to do, but we

must commit ourselves to doing it.

Interestingly, part of the reason that payday lenders are flourishing in our communities is because banks have been, and many still are, skeptical about making loans in our communities. It was called "redlining" some time ago. That's when banks would take the census tracts and draw a red line around predominantly black neighborhoods and absolutely would not make a loan to anyone who lived within those tracts.

I suppose it still must be going on, especially since some banks are trying their very best to do away with the Community Reinvestment Act, which mandates a certain amount of business that banks do be done in black communities.

Lord have mercy! It seems like everybody's preying on us. I

wish they were praying for us instead of preying on us.

But it's not as if we don't have the ability to put a stop to it. You can determine where and with whom you spend your money. You don't really have to be so eager to get something that you can't search out responsible people who care about your community to do business with.

I really don't mean to be trying to tell anybody what to do, but what one of us does impacts us all. There are even some banks that won't put a branch in our community, yet they take advantage of those billions we spend each year.

Anyway, just think about it, and as always, God bless you. Amen!

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of The Chronicle. E-mail him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.

Jackson playing race card



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

The instant that Santa Barbara sheriff's deputies slapped the cuffs on the ex-pop king, Michael Jackson screamed that he was the victim of a conspiracy. In an interview Sunday with his newfound spiritual mentor, Jesse Jackson, Mike got even more explicit and said that he's an easy target because he's a rich, famous black man.

Jackson cast himself in the mold of Muhammad Ali, Nelson Mandela, and Jack Johnson, all high-profile blacks who allegedly wound up on the legal hot seat because they were black.

Jackson first gingerly flipped the race card on the table when he charged that Santa Barbara County sheriff's deputies roughed him up when he was being searched. He implied that black men, even a black man named Michael Jackson, could be the victim of police abuse. Those are instant and identifiable words that are guaranteed to stir racial passions, anger, and protest among many blacks.

Many blacks reflexively play the race card because of their past brutal treatment at the hands of white police, judges, prosecutors, and juries. Jackson's staggering \$3 million bail, the slapping of handcuffs on him, the small army of lawmen that ransacked his ranch, and the seemingly relentless Jackson-is-guilty racial tilt in some of the media further convinced blacks that Jackson was tried, judged, and convicted before he ever set foot in a courtroom.

When Jackson's home was raided on the day his greatest hits album "Number Ones" was released, some blacks immediately pounced on that and saw sinister conspiracy doings.



Michael Jackson waves to fans outside a courthouse. KRT Photo

Others even claimed that Jackson sealed his doom when he bought the rights to the Beatles song catalog and then added insult to injury by buying ATV publishing in 1985. This was the firm that controlled the Lennon-McCarthy music copyrights. In gobbling up their catalog, he supposedly had stepped beyond accepted racial parameters for a black. This supposedly made him a marked man.

If the mainstream media could relentlessly assault the character of prominent black men, and prosecutors could orchestrate a damaging campaign to convince the public of their guilt even before a trial, then, many blacks rationalized, every black was fair game.

Jackson was not just any black. His fabulous wealth allowed him to do what he pleased, and when he pleased. There were no constraints on what he could or couldn't do, other than those he put on himself. For most of his professional career, the media treated him as celebrity royalty and did not engage in

character assassination, and other than the usual celebrity lawsuits, there were no legal vendettas against him.

When some writers and commentators seemed to toss the presumption of his innocence out the window, many blacks were convinced that he was already fitted for a prison cell before the trial had begun. Jesse Jackson certainly believed that. His racial suspicion aroused, Jackson rushed to the ex-pop king's defense. The arrest, he claimed, "seemed aimed to destroy this media mogul." Fortunately Jackson had the presence of mind to at least veil his hint that there was a dark plot to get Jackson with the qualifying word "seemed."

The willingness of so many blacks to see hidden plots and conspiracies by whites to nail wealthy and famous ones such as Jackson is often confused and misinterpreted. The assumption is that racial loyalty trumps common sense and that blacks are willing to excuse and even condone bad,

even criminal behavior by other blacks as long as their persecutors are white. It's a bad assumption.

In a careful reading of opinion in the O.J. Simpson case, most blacks did not say that that he was incapable of committing murder, but that the system was incapable of giving him a fair trial.

This proved to be a terribly wrong-headed fear when Simpson was acquitted. The blacks who cheered the verdict were not cheering Simpson as a murderer who beat the rap. They were cheering a victory over what they regarded as a system hopelessly riddled with racial bias against them.

From the start of the Jackson case, there was little evidence that black suspicion that the criminal justice system is abusive toward them translated ipso facto into blind faith in Jackson's innocence.

Aside from scattered, infrequent quips and a handful of racial photo-op visits to black areas and churches during his adult professional career, Jackson never visibly paraded his racial identity. It appeared that he did the exact opposite: He ran from it. Though he did take a private interest in black causes, he did not make a public point of it.

This did not mean that under his surgically altered face, garish outfits, and odd lifestyle that he didn't care about blacks. The perception simply was that he didn't, and that made it all the more peculiar for blacks to see Jackson as a racial target. Prosecutors and law enforcement treated him as a special case. It had nothing to do with race and everything to do with his fame, name, and celebrity notoriety.

Still, Jackson and Jackson have dumped race and conspiracy back on the public table. Now that they have, expect it to lurk even closer to the surface in Santa Maria.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is a columnist for BlackNews.com, an author, and a political analyst.