

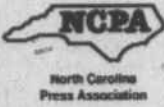
OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Wal-Mart's debacle



Ernie Pitt

This & That

Once again we are witness to a major corporation making a racial boo-boo, this time by linking DVDs of famous African-Americans to the DVD "Planet of the Apes." Apologize all you want to, but I'd be willing to bet that the person who did that did it intentionally. He/she probably is laughing right now about it.

And that's what's so sick about the whole thing. People have become so callous and insensitive about the feelings and struggles of African-Americans that they don't even have the heart or compassion of decency nor respect.

What's really sad too is how some of us... yes... some of us believe that we can ingratiate ourselves with racist people and corporations that practice this despicable activity. I am reminded again of the African-American who stood up in a meeting and declared that he would not hire any blacks because they wouldn't work. That's not much better than Wal-Mart matching our heroes with "Planet of the Apes."

For me, that's why we must support our own even when it hurts, and sometimes it does. But look at what our forefathers had to go through so we could have the opportunities that we have today. Imagine what it must have been like growing up in Mississippi during the 17th and 18th centuries - when children were literally bred for slavery... when mothers were afraid to bond with their children because they knew that soon the children would be on

the auction block for sale. Think about how slaves were brought to America in chains and forced to have babies with members of tribes who were natural enemies. Think about the venom that slave owners forced down the throats of house slaves and field slaves... making the house slaves feel superior to those who were forced to work in the fields. Think about the degradation, the scorn, the wrath brought on our people, who were at the time legally classified as only three-fifths of a man.

That's what makes what Wal-Mart did so egregious and hateful. And something ought to be done about it. Wal-Mart has no visible relationship with the African-American community. Wal-Mart doesn't participate in any community events to speak of. It just sucks the economic blood from our communities, and some of us help Wal-Mart do it.

There is no excuse for what Wal-Mart did. Wal-Mart ought to issue a serious apology and then look at the corporation's lack of relationships with our community and do something about it. Wal-Mart should immediately look at how it can begin to partner with organizations to begin to give back. It also needs to use African-American media for some of the hundreds of millions of dollars it spends on promotions and other marketing efforts.

I sincerely hope that we will stop taking this crap off of big corporations and small-minded African-Americans as well. God bless you. Amen.

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GEORGE BUSH - CABANA BOY



Snatching the King legacy



Earl Ofari Hutchinson

Guest Columnist

The scramble to snatch a piece of Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy has not diminished one bit in the 20 years since the first King national holiday was celebrated.

Ironically, Ronald Reagan was the first to grab at it. Reagan fought tooth and nail against passage of the King holiday bill. After insinuating that King was a Communist, Reagan signed it only after Congress passed it overwhelmingly, and virtually ensured that the bill was veto-proof.

But then Reagan reversed gears and apologized to a deeply hurt Coretta Scott King, King's widow, and effusively praised King as a champion of freedom and democracy. Reagan said that King's struggle for equality was his struggle too.

During the furious battles that raged over affirmative action in the 1990s, conservatives snatched a flowery line from King's "I Have a Dream" speech and boasted that he would have opposed racial quotas, preferences, and by extension affirmative action if he had lived. It was a wild stretch. King almost certainly would have been a vigorous supporter of affirmative action if he had lived. But in his speeches and writings, he also stressed personal responsibility, self-help, strong families, and religious values as goals that blacks should strive to attain.

In the late 1960s when King denounced the Vietnam War, embraced militant union struggles, and barnstormed around the country blasting wealth and class privilege, the Red-baiters and professional King haters branded him a Communist. The Lyndon Johnson White House turned hostile. Corporate and foundation supporters slowly turned off the money spigot. The NAACP, Urban League, black Democrats, and some in King's own organization turned their backs on him.

During his last days, King spent much of his time fund raising and defending his policies against the critics within and without his organization. The backbiting, carping of and backpedaling from King not by his enemies, but by some of his one-time friends and supporters got worse when he railed against the penchant for lavish personal spending, luxury apartments and fancy homes by some of his group's staffers.

In his last installment on



The nation will remember Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday.

King, "At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68," Taylor Branch told how King stormed out of a planning meeting on his Poor Peoples March in fury at the attacks at him by some of his top aides who wanted to scrap the march. The issue of uniting masses of poor people for economic uplift smacked of class war, and was just too risky and dangerous. The fear was that it would hopelessly alienate their Democratic Party boosters.

King was unfazed by their criticism and hurled another broadside at them for their personal egoism, selfishness, and opportunism. King's civil rights friends weren't the only ones who took shots at him.

Many black ministers joined in the King bash. At the National Baptist Convention in 1961, then and now the largest black religious group in America, King and a band of dissidents challenged the convention's leaders to give more active support to the civil rights battles. They wanted none of that. They flung un-Christian-like threats and insults at King and the civil rights advocate-ministers, engaged in fisticuffs with them, and slandered King as a

"hoodlum and crook."

When the dust settled, King was summarily booted out of the organization and set up a rival ministers group. Even after King's death, and he took his place among America's heroes, many black ministers still remained stone silent on the assault on civil liberties protections, the gutting of job and social programs, and U.S. militarism. These were all issues that King relentlessly and loudly spoke out against when he was alive.

In an even more insulting twist, many black ministers, and that included one of King's daughters, shamelessly and unapologetically evoked King's name to pound gay rights and same-sex marriage. There's not a shred of evidence that King would have been a gay rights opponent. Coretta even demanded that one group of ministers cease using his name to back an anti-gay referendum in Miami a few years ago. Yet they still snatch at his legacy and hail King as one of their own on the King holiday.

Then there's the King holiday. Though many corporations and government agencies plaster full-page ads in black

newspapers that extol King on his holiday, and tout how much he's done for them, the King holiday is still rock bottom among the national holidays that businesses and government agencies observe. An annual survey by BNA Inc., a Washington-based business news publisher, revealed that about one-quarter of businesses give their workers a day off with pay. That number pales even in comparison with the next least celebrated holiday, Presidents Day.

King is no different than other towering historical figures, especially those that had the bad fortune to fall to an assassin's bullet. The hypocrisy, mythmaking, embellishments, and outright distortions quickly kick in about them. Everyone wants a piece of the fallen legend to puff up his or her importance and whatever social and political axe he or she seeks to grind. Fortunately, King's legacy is still big and wide enough to snatch chunks of.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is a political analyst and social issues commentator, and the author of "The Crisis in Black and Black" (Middle Passage Press).