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Choice for a younger generation

NAACP's mission: recruit new blood

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The NAACP is looking for a new image.

The nation's oldest civil rights organization has committed itself to recruiting young members and including them in decision-making. That challenge now belongs to Jamal Bryant, the NAACP's youth director.

Kweisi Mfume, newly elected president of the NAACP, has promised "a new beginning" for the 87-year-old civil rights group.

Mfume envisions an organization with a strong youth and young adult core, with programs geared to education and political awareness for this group new to the NAACP.



Mfume

Said Mfume at a recent chapter meeting in Charlotte, "We must be committed to our youth, they are the future and we have let them down...They are apathetic and it is our fault."

To that end Mfume has hand selected Bryant, a 25-year-old activist and minister.

"Jamal," said Mfume, "will hit the ground running."

"Hit the ground running," laughs Bryant, "I just hit the ground."

Bryant has the responsibility of making the NAACP a viable organization for young people and increasing youth involvement in the organization's 500 chapters.

"When you go to an NAACP meeting," Bryant said, "you see people age 50 and over. We are missing those people from 18 to 50. These are the people with resources, creativity, and new experiences."

According to Bryant, ambivalence among younger African Americans stems from the feeling that civil rights groups like the NAACP are obsolete.

"Images of rubber hoses and dogs just don't motivate today's younger generations," Bryant said. "You have to show them in today's terms what our organization can do."

No stranger to the front lines in the international civil rights struggle, Bryant spent six months organizing voter registration in newly emancipated Johannesburg, South

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Casualty of Liberia's war



PHOTO/HERBERT L. WHITE

Philip Jorgu came to the U.S. six years ago to earn a master's degree at Winthrop University, but has been forced to remain in America as Liberia's civil war rages on.

Bloodshed extends stay in U.S.

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

ROCK HILL — Six years ago, Philip Jorgu came to America to earn a master's degree before returning to his native Liberia.

He hasn't been home since.

Jorgu's been stuck in America for the duration of a bloody civil war that has claimed countless lives and disrupted others in the west African country. For Jorgu, he doesn't know the whereabouts of his family, which was last in the capital city of Monrovia.

"I was in contact with them until about 10 days ago, when the power was taken down by rebels," he said Monday. "From there on, I was unable to go through with the telephone, or e-mail or fax. My brothers and parents are still in Monrovia, and I look forward to hearing from them soon."

Liberia and the U.S. have a unique relation-

ship. The country, founded by freed American slaves in 1854, copied all things American, including its constitution, language and currency, and was seen as the model African democracy. Now that factional fighting has escalated between partisans loyal to warlord Roosevelt Johnson or rebel leader Charles Taylor, chances for peaceful settlement appears more distant. The U.S. and United Nations are unwilling or unable to step in as peacekeepers, although peace talks in Ghana have been scheduled. America, Jorgu says, could've stopped the fighting before it escalated by kicking out foreign factions and restoring free elections.

"Most of the problem in Liberia is the making of America, in the sense that the military that's oppressing people (was) funded by U.S. taxpayers' money," he said. "When the war started, it would've never gone this far (if the

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What cost affirmation of Walton?

Commissioners' 5-4 vote keeps building named after colleague

By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The late Bob Walton will have a building named after him, but not without political fallout.

Mecklenburg County Commissioners voted 5-4 Tuesday night not to rescind its earlier decision to name Stonewall Plaza the Robert L. Walton Building.

The vote was split along party lines. Chairman Ann Schrader was the only Republican to vote to leave the change in place.

"It's not something that should have been brought up in the first place, especially after hearing some of the discussion last night," Schrader said. "It was a mistake to this community for us to revisit the issue."

At-large commissioner Parks Helms, who voted to keep the change, described the meeting as "a highly-charged emotional meeting, one that raised issues that the people in the county needed to confront."

Walton, who died in 1994, was a commissioner for 17 years, mostly in District 2. He was found guilty of assault in 1986 against an 18-year-old male in a sexual encounter and sentenced to 30 days in jail.

Commissioners voted unanimously to name the building after Walton in November. Commissioner Jim Richardson, who succeeded Walton, suggested the honor. There was no discussion.

Commissioner Linda McCall said she placed the issue back on the agenda after receiving calls because she felt the decision was too hasty.

Helms said the issue was politically based.

"This really was not so much about Bob Walton as it was about the divisiveness and intolerance that is all too prevalent in this community," Helms said. "This simply was one of those issues



Helms

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Foundation wants memorial for black Revolutionary troops

By Olive Vassell
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Last week, as America remembered the millions who died fighting for their country, a group planning to construct a memorial to black Revolutionary War soldiers urged the nation not to forget the contribution of these long-neglected African American patriots.

"We urge everyone to join with citizens like Ossie Davis and Joanne Jones, a direct descendant of two black patriots, to support this most important memorial. Black Americans have the opportunity to raise the money -- or we will lose this memorial forever," said Wayne F. Smith, executive director of

the Black Patriots Foundation.

In a May 30 ceremony at the site of the proposed memorial on the Mall, located between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, the BPF paid tribute to the 5,000 African Americans who served in the Revolutionary War. The site will be forfeited if the \$6.5 million needed to construct the memorial is not collected by the October deadline. An additional \$3 million is needed for maintenance and other costs, which can be raised after construction begins. During observances, which included presentation of colors by the Colonial Guard, U.S. Military District of Washington, the BPF announced the celebration of Black Patriots Week, June 30-July 7. It will be marked with special events nationwide. The organization also unveiled a series of Public Service

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Editor launches paper with first-hand view of homelessness

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Word on the street is that a new newspaper about the homeless will hit the streets soon.

Word On The Street editor Michael Manual is busy putting the finishing touches on the effort, which will be a 12-page tabloid-sized publication on newsprint. It is a non-profit operation.

"The paper should come out June 15," said Manual, a 28-year-old former investment broker. "The first issue will have an interview with Montel Williams. We addressed issues of homelessness and some political entities and what they need to do about homelessness in America.

"The goal of the newspaper is to assist the homeless and financially oppressed community in spreading the word to various communities throughout Charlotte. It will be strictly on issues pertaining to them -- their needs, objectives, etc.

"Readership is directed to the community, all different shapes and sizes of economic structure and social structure. It is for and about the homeless, but it's not going to the homeless.

"We also want to create economic diversity. The homeless will be selling the paper as vendors. Anyone can sell it."

Word on the Street will cost \$1, with 75 cents going to the vendor, Manual said.

Manual takes more than a passing interest in homeless-

ness. He's been there.

Born in Germany to a caucasian mother and an African American father, he first came to the United States in 1986, after high school. He worked on Wall Street with New York Life Insurance Co., he said, transferred to Atlanta and then to Charlotte in 1995.

Here, Manual said, he worked in NationsBank's investment department for a while.

Then a downward spiral began. Manual suffered bouts of severe depression and spent several weeks in the Mecklenburg County mental health center.

From there, he went to the Uptown Shelter.

He resigned his job at NationsBank.

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PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Michael Manual (left) hands out fliers advertising Word On The Street, a newspaper about the homeless.

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