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NAACP convention closes, saluting return of civil rights

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Ronald Flamer, a veteran of NAACP conventions, said Thursday the future looks bright for the organization that almost collapsed under the weight of scandal and bankruptcy a few years ago.

“Four years ago, all we were hearing about was who was fighting who. But it looks like we’ve put that all behind us,” said Flamer, a retired city worker from Baltimore. “Now all we are talking about is issues. We’re finally getting it together, and civil rights are back.”

Flamer’s enthusiasm echoed throughout as the group’s 89th annual convention drew to a close with a rousing address by Vice President Al Gore.

“America needs the NAACP more than ever,” Gore declared. He brought a flag-waving audience of 3,000 to its feet several times with a defense of the association’s traditional civil rights mission.

“You are at the vanguard of our most critical battles,” Gore said of the group’s efforts to save affirmative action, give voice to the problems of black farmers and reduce disparities between blacks and whites in health and education.

It seems the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is in as good a shape for the battles ahead as it has been in years, members said.

“I’ve had people come up to me saying ‘thank you’ because civil rights are back, civil rights are back,” national board chairman Julian Bond said. “It’s a fantastic feeling. The attendance was fabulous and goes to show that people want us back in the social justice business.”

Kweisi Mfume, NAACP pres-



Vice President Al Gore, left, raises the hand of Coretta Scott King, widow of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., after Gore addressed the NAACP 89th National Convention in Atlanta Thursday — AP Photo

ident, who runs the group’s day-to-day operations, said, “I’ve seen more energy here than I have in a long time. To me, it says we are unifying because the squabbling is pretty much absent this year.”

Squabbling, lawsuits and bad blood had become a way of life for the NAACP just a few years ago.

With a \$4 million debt and top officials charged with ethical and moral misdeeds, some social activists feared the NAACP risked becoming a vast collection of local branches

with no central authority or leadership.

For members like Eva Shankin of LaFourche Parish, La., the “bad days” of the NAACP seem like centuries ago. “Now we are back to the issues, and I’m happy about it,” she said.

For Shankin, AIDS among black Americans is the kind of issue she is glad the group is focusing on.

“They give us so much information here. Its wonderful, but the work really begins when we get back home,” Shankin said.

Racial politics still with us

Georgians may feel a bit smug about what happened in Alabama last week. They shouldn't. A similar scenario may be playing out in the politics of our state. The issue of race remains near center stage on both sides of the Chatahoochee.

In Alabama, Gov. Fob James swept away challenger

Winton Blount in the GOP primary runoff for governor. James won on the strength of a white-backlash vote in rural Alabama that resulted from Birmingham Mayor Richard Arrington's endorsement of Blount.

Soliciting Arrington's backing and a promise of delivering huge numbers of black voters for Blount turned out to be a fatal mistake for the wealthy businessman aspiring to replace James.

In Georgia, Democratic front-runner Roy Barnes has lined up an impressive list of black leaders in his camp. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, state Senate

Majority Leader Charles Walker, former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson and home-run king Hank Aaron are among the big names for Barnes.

Barnes' main rival for the Democratic nomination, Secretary of State Lewis Massey, boasted earlier that Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell would help his bid for governor. But Campbell's public support for Massey appears to have cooled.

Instead, the Massey campaign has circulated widely among white voters Rep. McKinney's statement enthusiastically praising Barnes as a candidate African Americans can count on.

Barnes went on TV last week with a commercial in which he promised to build work camps to "make criminals sweat." Massey responded with a news release in which he characterized Barnes as soft on crime. He quoted a former Georgia sheriff, Ronnie Bowman, as declaring in 1990: "The fact is, Roy Barnes talks like Dirty Harry, but he votes like Barney Fife."

Massey put up his own commercial promising more law officers, harsher sentences for certain categories of violent offenders and mandatory jail time for wife-beaters. The ad features two white Georgia sheriffs.

Massey's message is muted but still clear. Barnes is in league with the black power structure. One doesn't have to be a political science professor to understand that "soft on crime" is a euphemism for "playing ball with blacks."

This is high-risk politics in the Democratic primary. As much as 35 to 40 percent of the Democratic vote July 21 may come from African Americans.

Republican candidate Mike Bowers is taking a less subtle approach in his bid to deny Guy Millner the GOP nomination for governor.

Bowers has launched a direct attack on affirmative action programs. Bowers says one of his first acts as governor would be eliminating from state government racial preferences and set-asides. He assails the black-dominated city government of Atlanta as incompetent and corrupt. He advocates mandating state control of the city's most valuable property, Hartsfield International Airport.

Bowers' tough talk on the crime issues makes Democratic rhetoric on the subject seem whimpering by comparison.

Front-running Republican Guy Millner has not responded directly to Bowers. Millner han-

dles the crime issue in general terms in his TV ads. He favors an end to paroles, which even Bowers, Barnes and Massey agree is not feasible.

And Millner has skipped every public forum for candidates since January.

His polls show he may beat Bowers without a runoff. His counselors obviously have advised him: Don't take a chance on making a blunder by participating in public debates, especially when sensitive issues regarding race will be discussed.

The race-baiting strategy, implied or direct, will not be played out fully in Georgia — or Alabama — until the general election campaigns begin after Labor Day.

If Barnes and Bowers are finally the nominees (which appears at the moment to be an unlikely match-up), the contest for governor could turn on black-and-white issues.

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OPINION



BILL SHIPP

Tuesday, July 7, 1998 3-B

The Valdosta Daily Times



NATION UPDATE

Three men indicted in dragging death

JASPER, Texas — Three white men were indicted on capital murder charges Monday in the alleged hate-slaying of a black man who was chained to a pickup truck and dragged to his death.

Named in one indictment are John William King, 23, of Jasper and Lawrence Russell Brewer, 31, of Sulphur Springs. A second indictment names Shawn Allen Berry, 23, of Jasper.

Even Clinton can't bridge a racial gap

By MARSHA MERCER

WASHINGTON — People laugh that President Clinton is too eager to share everybody's pain, but his ability to find common ground with diverse groups and even his critics is a key to his lasting popularity.

Clinton's storied empathy was put to the test last week in his latest conversation on race, broadcast on PBS.

Billed as the third and final presidential "town hall" meeting of Clinton's race initiative, the hour-long roundtable discussion had the feel of a glorified NewsHour talkathon.

NewsHour anchor Jim Lehrer moderated, and four of the program's regular commentators were joined by four other writers, journalists and educators. Blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans were represented.

Clinton deftly deflected criticism about his race initiative with personal anecdotes and family stories. He evoked the memory of his enlightened storekeeper grandfather in rural Arkansas whose customers mostly were black. He talked about his own experiences with stereotypes and diversity.

"I really identify with what you (said)," he told Richard Rodriguez, a Mexican-American essayist who railed against "this complete fiction of the Hispanic race." The term Hispanic was created by the government.

Rodriguez recalled his anger at receiving preferential treatment for jobs as a Hispanic. "I threw the jobs back ... I didn't want those jobs."

Clinton's point of reference was his brief stint as a law professor. He said he had been the only person on the law school faculty

who voted against the tenure policy, "because I never wanted anybody to guarantee me a job. I told them they could tell me to leave tomorrow, and I'd go."

Author Sherman Alexie talked about the difficult living conditions he and other Native Americans have endured. His home didn't get running water until he was 7; he still remembers the day the toilet came.

Reminding Clinton of an embarrassing lapse in his race initiative, Alexie said, "An Indian has not sat on this kind of panel before, so me being here for the first time is something amazing."

Clinton jumped in with another story from his own life.

When he ran for president in 1992, about all he knew about Native Americans was that there was a "significant but very small population" of Indians in Arkansas and that "my grandmother was one-quarter Cherokee."

He talked about spending a lot of time visiting reservations, getting to know leaders and learning about the "nation-to-nation legal relationship" between Indians and the federal government.

Clinton said he concluded that "American Indians had gotten the worst of both worlds. They weren't given enough help and they certainly didn't have enough responsibility and power, in my view, to build the future."

Few, if any solutions, were broached during the conversation, but plenty of problems were aired.

Instead of criticizing Clinton in absentia as NewsHour commentators often do, they had him at the table. At one point, Clarence Page, a columnist for the Chicago Tribune, lectured Clinton on affirmative action, say-

ing that desegregation doesn't come from good wishes alone.

"You've got to work at it. You've got to take some mechanical steps to get from here to there," Page said. He suggested that Clinton had been "tiptoeing" around the issue.

"One problem with the race dialogue was that I think you were reluctant to deal with the question of affirmative action."

In his rambling response, Clinton again drew on his own experience.

"One of the reasons I applied to Georgetown (University) was they had foreign students there and they had a policy of having a kid from every state there. Maybe I got in because there weren't so many people from Arkansas who applied, for all I know."

So, maybe the president also benefited from a form of affirmative action.

Clinton eventually said one of the problems of talking about race is that everyone is too polite.

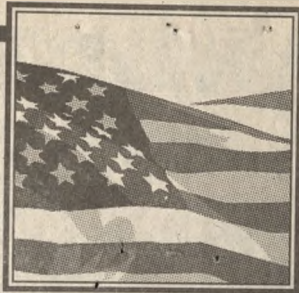
Alexie said people tend to use "coded" language.

"Usually, what they'll do to me is come up and tell me they're Cherokee," he complained.

Everybody laughed, but the implicit criticism of Clinton showed just how hard it is even for a gifted politician to make interracial connections.

"We're just getting warmed up," the president protested genially as the program ended a few minutes later.

(Marsha Mercer covers the White House for Media General News Service. Write her at 1214 National Press Building, Washington, D.C. 20045 or e-mail mmercer@media-general.com)



NATION UPDATE

4-B-Tuesday, July 14, 1998

AACP president Mfume calls Supreme Court members 'hypocrites'

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Supreme Court justices "should be ashamed of themselves," NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said Monday, pointing to anti-affirmative action decisions and a lack of minority law clerks at the high court.

"The Supreme Court finds themselves as hypocrites when they talk of diversity," Mfume said in an address to 3,000 NAACP members. "They make decisions on affirmative action, what people can and can't do in this society. But they just pontificate."

Mfume said that only seven of the 397 law clerks who work for Supreme Court justices are of black ancestry and that no American Indian has ever served in such a position.

"You have to hunt to find any" minority members working for the court, Mfume said.

In May, Chief Justice William Rehnquist turned down a request by minority lawyers to discuss the scarcity of minority law clerks at the Supreme Court, saying he did not think such a meeting "would serve any useful purpose."

The National Bar Association,

which represents 17,000 black attorneys, had extended the invitation to Rehnquist on behalf of a coalition of minority bar association leaders.

The controversy was sparked by a published report that of the clerks hired by all nine current justices, 1 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent were black and 4.5 percent were Asian-American.

Supreme Court spokeswoman Toni House said the court would have no comment on Mfume's remarks.

A former congressman from Maryland who now runs the day-to-day operations for the nation's largest civil rights group, Mfume said that until the justices do a better job of integrating their own workplace, they shouldn't issue decisions that roll back affirmative action and thereby create less racially diverse work settings.

The only justice singled out by name was Antonin Scalia. Mfume said the conservative jurist who has consistently voted against affirmative action provisions has never hired a black person during his years on the bench.

"We know now why you make the decisions that you make," Mfume said to enthusiastic applause.

In his address, Mfume also urged black Americans to become more active in voter drives for the November elections.

"We need to do as we have been since 1914 and throw those rascals out," he said.

After Mfume's talk, the group held several workshops on topics ranging from minority participation in the telecommunications industry to preserving affirmative action.

William Kennard, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, told his audience a growing "digital divide" has created a gap between those who have access to technology and those who don't.

Kennard, the first black to head the FCC, said white children are three times more likely to have access to a computer than their minority counterparts.

Ted Turner, a Time Warner vice-chairman, said it would be "a waste of time" for investors without massive capital to buy into established communication links like cable television because the costs are too high.

But Turner said opportunities for small investors exist in emerging technologies "that haven't been claimed yet."

Are We Really Ready To Live With The Truth?

Is it really true we can't live with the truth? If the skeletons which are kept secretly locked away in the bedroom closets of the local community were to speak, what would they say?

Perhaps, tales of illicit lust and love would be told. Or, just may be, stories of murder and mayhem would be revealed.

Would the truth really hurt or is it that someone, somewhere and for whatever reason, just couldn't live with the truth? Several years ago, I wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper.

The name of the paper doesn't matter but for the record, it wasn't The Mailbox Post. Anyway, the editor refused to publish my

letter, as was well within his rights.

His reasoning for not printing my letter was that it could have "possibly" been inflammatory and might cause hard feelings between some of the community's residents. My question, of course, was "inflammate and cause hard feelings between whom?"

No answer was ever given. I believe the press, more than anyone else, has the responsibility for being the custodian and distributor of accurate and available information.

When members of the press become spineless and weak-kneed, then not only will we possibly not be able to live with the truth, we may never know what the truth really is. Who else other than the press can provide a forum to let us determine what the truth is - special interest groups, known and unknown criminals, partisan

politicians, the politically correct, religious zealots or shamelessly greedy people? By the way, the contents of my unpublished letter to the editor were later written about in two of my columns that appeared in this newspaper.

And as far as I know, no one became inflamed and no hard feelings were caused between residents of the community. I, for one, believe that we can live with the truth.

What's more dangerous than the press refusing to print the truth? In my opinion, it's when governmental and pseudo-governmental agencies blindfold and muzzle the public.

Take the "Freeman S. Rivers Rule" for example. The Hahira City Council took a democratic step backwards by changing the "Citizens Wishing to be Heard" portion of its public meetings.

Moore Continued From Page 5

This change resulted because citizens like Freeman S. Rivers stood up and publicly complained about the social inequities which resulted from the policies of Hahira's city government. According to some folks whom I've talked with, Freeman was once ordered to be physically removed from a council meeting for no apparent reason.

After all, shouldn't citizens, under a democratic system of government, be allowed to speak freely in public forums.

Apparently not in Hahira. The "Citizens Wishing to be Heard" segment of council meetings - henceforth the "Freeman S. Rivers Rule" - is now a cumbersome system of bureaucratic restraint.

Residents of Hahira must now meet non-flexible deadlines and fill out agenda forms in order to get on the agenda to speak at council meetings. Even then, there's still no guarantee they'll be heard.

I was told by one resident of Hahira that if a strict "chain-of-command" process isn't followed, then the agenda form is simply ignored. This person also said that after two months, it was revealed his agenda form was denied because it was submitted on a "copy of a form" rather than on an "original form."

Has the Hahira City Council closed the doors to its council meetings because the council can't really live with the truth? Or is the council really trying to hide the truth by sweeping it under a rug?

Then, there's the local agency known as Project Change. In my opinion, Project Change is nothing more than an exercise in "feel-good futility."

Perhaps, the truth is out there somewhere and if it is, Project Change won't find it. Why?

As I see it, the mission of Project Change is atypical of the bleeding-heart liberal approach to problem-solving. That is,

identify a social problem, talk about it, collect money to help pay for an imaginary solution, convince those who will listen something is being done about the problem - then, in essence, do nothing.

In other words, Project Change is much to do about nothing. If its board of directors could, the only thing they would have changed before any of you could read this column, would have been to try to shut me up to keep me from telling the truth.

The only time anything will ever change is when the skeletons that are secretly locked away in the community's bedroom closets speak. This is when we'll know that we can live with the truth.

I don't believe the skeletons are ready to speak yet. When they are ready, I want to be the first person to hear their secrets.

And, as always, have a good week.



Charles Moore
Mailbox Post Columnist



GEORGIA UPDATE

Powell urges NAACP to empower black youth

ATLANTA — Retired Gen. Colin Powell told NAACP members Tuesday it makes no sense to preserve affirmative action programs if black youth aren't ready academically or socially to take advantage of them.

Instead, improving schools and strengthening home life should be the top priorities of the NAACP, Powell told 3,500 delegates to the civil rights group's annual convention.

"The choice before us is either getting back to the task of building all children or just keep building more jails," Powell said to waves of applause.

Assessing the value of desegregation

ATLANTA — To the approximately 600,000 NAACP faithful around the world, Julian Bond and Kweisi Mfume are the black “dynamic duo.”

Never before in its 89-year history has the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the nation's oldest and most venerable civil rights organization, had two such capable leaders in its two top positions at the same time.

Bond accepted the chairmanship of the board of directors in February. He replaced Myrlie Evers-Williams, who had served for two years. Mfume became president and chief executive in 1996, replacing Benjamin Chavis, who was ousted in scandal.

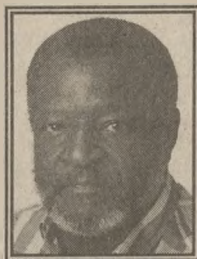
For the near future, each man will need to capitalize on the power of his good looks, charisma and exceptional intellect because, despite the NAACP's good economic outlook, the organization is at a crossroads on several fronts, including trying to redefine its role in the wake of the nation's new conservative mood.

Ironically, its most serious dilemma, which will surface this week in Atlanta, revolves around school desegregation, the concept that has defined the NAACP and the Legal Defense Fund since 1954. That is when the U.S. Supreme Court — with the NAACP representing black children — outlawed separate-but-equal public school facilities in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

Years later, in 1971, when the court ruled in *Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* that “forced busing” could be used to achieve racial balance in public schools, the NAACP believed that it had discovered the perfect tool for bringing whites and blacks together in the same schoolhouses. Most blacks and many white liberals believed that the education of black children would radically improve as a result of desegregation.

Until then in the South, black children had been victims of *de jure* and *de facto* segrega-

OPINION



**BILL
MAXWELL**

tion, which meant used books, slim budgets, few materials and resources and, of course, run-down buildings.

Today, nearly 45 years after *Brown*, some NAACP board members, many state and local directors, and rank-and-file members attending this week's national convention, which began Friday and ends Thursday, argue that desegregation is no longer viable either as a political tactic or a social philosophy.

During the weeks leading up to last year's annual convention in Pittsburgh, Evers-Williams promised that the organization would seriously debate whether it should continue to pursue the desegregation of public schools or redirect its efforts into improving the schools that the bulk of black children attend because of where they live.

She even told a *New York Times* reporter that she would consider a resolution to reverse the board's traditional stance on desegregation. The day before voting delegates arrived in Pittsburgh, however, she reversed herself, saying the NAACP would never alter its position on integration in the schools.

Mfume joined Evers-Williams at the podium to calm delegates who had expected a forthright debate. He suggested that desegregation is a complex process that requires more than busing and mixing the races in the classroom. He said also that desegregation — or real integration — will occur when segregated housing patterns change and when gaps between the incomes of whites and blacks are closed.

“We can't let ourselves be isolated from the real world,” he said. “If we're separated, we can't survive. I understand the lure of separatism. When people are ticked off, they dig in. They pull away from each other. They make generalizations about this group or that group... . Separatism doesn't have a functional reality in our pluralistic world.”

Mfume and Bond, today's NAACP leaders, must again sort out the group's stance on desegregation and neighborhood schools. Although the two are not publicly talking about the issue in advance of the voting delegates' arrival, as Evers-Williams did last year, conferees who support vouchers and charter schools are saying that they deserve and want some straight answers.

After all, recent surveys conducted by the

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington think tank, and other public opinion organizations show that most blacks nationwide support vouchers and neighborhood schools. They certainly are disenchanted with public schools.

Where does Bond, a former Georgia state representative, stand? Remember, he is a civil rights legend who, as a student at Morehouse College, led demonstrations to desegregate public places in Atlanta. And in 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee hired him as its first communications director.

“Generally among black Americans,” Bond said last year, “there is a feeling that (school integration) has come to naught, that so much energy has been put into it without commensurate results and that white America has been so resistant that you're butting your head against the wall. I think that it's a wrong attitude, but it's an understandable attitude.”

Evers-Williams and Mfume shut down the desegregation debate in 1997. This time, though, pro-debate delegates have more ammunition on their side. Increasing numbers of federal judges, for example, are releasing school districts from desegregation orders, receiving “unitary” status.

A unitary district is either one that never practiced racial segregation or one that, through good faith compliance with court orders, has remedied — to the extent practicable — the vestiges of such discrimination.

While judges are preparing to declare districts unitary, more systems nationwide are establishing charter schools and voucher programs each semester. These trends show no signs of slowing down.

At this year's convention, the group's 89th, the dynamic duo will need to pull out all the stops to silence rank-and-file conferees — most of them parents — who want to publicly re-evaluate the viability of school desegregation. Sooner or later, the NAACP's top brass must let a real debate take place. Sooner is better than later, many delegates are saying.

Bill Maxwell is an editorial writer and columnist for the St. Petersburg Times. He can be reached on the Internet at maxwell@sptimes.com.

10-A Friday, July 17, 1998

Black Civil War soldiers remembered at Arlington

ARLINGTON Va. — Black soldiers who braved both cannon fire and bigotry during the Civil War were remembered by descendants Thursday as heroes who marched for freedom and equality.

A ceremony in the amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery was the first event in a three-day celebration leading to the dedication Saturday of a \$2.6 million monument to the 208,943 black Union soldiers and their white officers.

As descendants of the troopers and supporters of the monument listened from marble benches, black men uniformed in the dark blue of the Union Army took turns reading citations of the dozens of black soldiers and sailors awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor during the war.