

# NATIONAL NEWS UPDATE

## Financial Aid For Black College Students Addressed



Marshall B. Bass, senior vice president of RJR Nabisco, Inc., addressed a conference on student financial aid organized by the Southern Education Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education.

The chains that hold back Black Americans from realizing their dreams is an educational handicap handed down by history, a corporate executive recently told 100 leaders of historically Black colleges who met in Atlanta.

Marshall B. Bass, senior vice president of RJR Nabisco, Inc., addressed a conference on student financial aid organized by the Southern Education Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. Bass praised the group for addressing student financial aid problems at traditionally Black colleges.

"Social consciousness has weakened prejudice. Legislation has outlawed discrimination in housing, employment and other arenas. But an educational gap continues to shackle the Black race," Bass said.

"Education is the primary tool that will enable minorities to keep moving ahead in our society," Bass continued. "Uplifting educational standards should be the highest priority in every Black household in America, because the desire to achieve begins at home. But achieving higher academic goals requires monetary resources as well as motivation. And I believe that the business sector is becoming increasingly important to enhanced educational opportunities for Blacks."

He noted that U.S. business funds a growing array of educational programs that benefit both Black youth and adults, including undergraduate scholarships, internship programs, graduate study assistance, and basic adult education programs.

"Corporate support of minority education enhances the pool of well-qualified corporate job candidates, and prepares people for other careers in which they can make a positive contribution to the economy. That, in turn, enhances the climate in which we do business," he explained.

Bass said that RJR Nabisco is particularly concerned that cutbacks in federal aid, weak recruiting efforts, rising tuition costs and lack of educational encouragement have contributed to a 3 percent drop in college enrollment among Blacks since 1980.

"It's estimated that one year at an average public college now costs about \$5,600," Bass said, "while private school requires more than \$10,000 a year. Considering that one-third of all Black American families have incomes under \$11,000 a year, the implications for our nation's future educational standards are alarming."

For those reasons, RJR Nabisco is the largest contributor to United Negro College Fund schools; makes substantial grants to the Consortium for Graduate Study in Management for minorities attending nine major universities; and has helped fund construction of new facilities at historically Black colleges. In addition, the company funds numerous scholarships earmarked for minority youth studying business, engineering and journalism.

"For us, support of minority education is a matter of corporate conscience, and common sense," Bass said. "Educational issues cannot be shouldered by civic and government agencies alone."

RJR Nabisco, Inc., an international consumer products corporation with headquarters in Atlanta, Ga., is the parent company of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. and Nabisco Brands, Inc. Well-known RJR Nabisco brands include Winston, Salem, Camel and Vantage cigarettes; Oreo cookies; Ritz and Premium crackers; Del Monte fruits and vegetables; Planters nuts and snacks; Life Savers candy; Nabisco Shredded Wheat cereals; and Fleischmann's margarine.

## Seniors Fight Social Security Cuts

"Don't let Social Security recipients' desperately needed cost-of-living hike fall victim to gimmicky accounting" — that was the warning given Congress Monday when the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare delivered nearly eight million petition signatures from its members and supporters.

"These petitions show budget negotiators on Capitol Hill and at the White House that older Americans won't stand idly by while their scheduled 4.2 percent hike is sacrificed to an accounting trick designed to make the deficit look smaller," said James Roosevelt, founder and chairman of the 4.5-million member National Committee.

"Funds collected through the Social Security tax can be used only to pay for benefits and administrative expenses," Roosevelt, a former congressman, reminded the House and Senate. "So merely piling up funds in the Social Security Trust Fund does not address the budget deficit elsewhere. It's just an easy way to hid red ink and avoid making the difficult decisions necessary to bring about a balanced budget."

"We're serving notice that those who attempt to balance the budget on the back of America's seniors do so at their own political peril," warned the head of the nation's second largest senior organization. "This talked-of COLA cut is only an accounting illusion as it related to the unbalanced budget. But the impact on seniors would be real — too terribly real."

Roosevelt said the National Committee had been collecting the 7,954,718 signatures over time so they could be used in just such an eventuality. "I know of no better use for them than to insure that the 4.2 percent Social Security COLA remains intact," he said.

## 1960s Civil Rights Movement Miniseries to be Produced

One of the most dramatic and significant chapters in the civil rights movement will be explored in a four hour television miniseries, "Selma, Lord, Selma", it was announced by Caryn Mandabach, President of The Carsey Werner Company. Currently in development at NBC with Susan Baerwald, Vice President of Miniseries and Novels for Television, the program will focus on the events leading up to the Selma-Montgomery march of 1965, as expressed through the eyes of two young Black girls. The miniseries is based on the memories of eight year old Sheyann Webb and her next door neighbor, Rachel West (age nine), which were recorded in their book, "Selma, Lord, Selma" (as told to Frank Sikora, University of Alabama Press, 1980).

Caryn Mandabach, who will executive produce with Tom Werner and Marcy Carsey, will also be joined in the project by co-executive producer Henry Hampton, whose recent documentary series "Eyes On The Prize" is one of the most critically acclaimed programs of its genre in many years. Director Peter Werner, best known for his credits on "LBJ: The Early Years" (which earned him an Emmy nomination), the original episode of "Moonlighting" and the current feature film "No Man's Land", has also been set. The script will be written by Alice Arlen, whose credits include "Silkwood" (co-written with Nora Ephron), Louis Malle's "Alamo Bay" and Susan Seidelman's new film "Cookie".

Commenting on the announcement, Susan Baerwald stated: "We're thrilled to be involved with such a talented and creative team in the development of a project of such importance."

Mandabach, whose company produces "The Cosby Show" and "A Different World" on NBC, was introduced to the concept when Henry Hampton requested Bill Cosby for a promotional television spot for "Eyes On The Prize". Asking to screen the program before presenting it to Cosby, Mandabach was stirred by the emotional power of the film and its subject matter. Mandabach immediately began discussions with Hampton on how to bring a dramatized version of the civil rights struggle to the screen.

"To do a fictionalized account of the essence of 'Eyes On The Prize', one of the most powerful and provocative TV programs I've ever seen, would be foolhardy," stated Mandabach. "What 'Selma, Lord, Selma' brings to this vital chapter of American history is a poignant, human face, much in the same way 'The Diary of Anne Frank' did so in describing the Holocaust."

Peter Werner, whom Mandabach knew had expressed a desire to do a project on the topic, was equally impressed by the Hampton documentary. "It was seeing 'Eyes On The Prize' that opened mine," recalled Werner. "It detailed one of the most dramatic human events of our century. What stories of courage, ideals, sacrifice, passion, defeat and victory. There were lives on the line and common men and women — and children leading the way. But how to tell the story in a way that would be personal? That was when we came across the book about two young Black girls who were there with all their innocence and dreams, right in the middle of 'Selma, Lord, Selma'."

Co-executive producer Henry Hampton looks forward to the creative freedom a theatrical treatment of the civil rights story represents, but is also aware of some of the pitfalls of dramatizing history. Hampton credits the spirit of collaboration between producers and scholars in "Eyes On The Prize" in insuring a faithful treatment of source materials and a careful attention to the factual basis. "My respect for Carsey-Werner and the creative team on this project makes me feel confident this same spirit will continue," stated Hampton. "To the people who did not see the documentary, and to the one half of the U.S. population not yet born or too young at the time to have seen what happened at Selma, this story brings to life an episode that reflects in a hundred ways what the civil rights movement was all about."

## How Do Blacks Manage in the 'Whitest' State in America?



Vermont's only Black state representative Francis Brooks greets a voter at the capitol of "The Whitest State in America."

What is life like for Blacks in Vermont, a state that has no Black lawyers, police officers, reporters or judges?

Life for Blacks in Vermont, who number about 1,200 of a total population of more than 500,000, has it ups and downs. On the "up" side, Francis Brooks, the sole Black in the state's House of Representatives, recalls in 1971 when Whites demonstrated their support of Blacks by helping to halt a Ku Klux Klan recruitment effort in the state. "The house passed a resolution condemning the belief of the KKK as totally alien in the tradition and fundamental principles of Vermont," he notes. Entrepreneur Lydia Clemmons says that when she opened Authentica, the country's only exclusively African mail-order store, it was so popular among her White neighbors that she quit her job as a nurse to operate Authentica full time. In addition, in 1980, Black families in Vermont had the highest average income of all Black families in the country.

On the "down" side, Dr. Jackson J. Clemmons, a university professor, tells of one Black woman whose doctor thought her headaches were caused by her Afro. "The doctor felt her natural was 'too heavy' for her head," Clemmons said. Clemmons added that an irate Ph.D. student was denied treatment at a hospital's emergency room because he was told his arms were too dark to see his veins and draw the needed blood. Black attorney Sam Johnson, once the state's assistant attorney general, gave up his fruitless, nearly eight year search for another position in the state, and moved to Wisconsin this year, where he is a construction attorney.

## Jackson Teams Up With "Rappers"

The spirit of rock activism — ignited two years ago by the "Sun City" and "We Are The World" benefit records — is on the rise again in the form of an anti-apartheid record and music video entitled "A.F.R.I.C.A.," which teams up New York City rappers Stetsasonic and the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

The Brooklyn-based Stetsasonic was inspired to create "A.F.R.I.C.A." following the broadcast on ABC-TV's "20/20" news-magazine of a report about the Reverend Jackson's visit to the "Frontline States" in Africa. These black-ruled nations — Angola, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, and Botswana — oppose apartheid in white-ruled South Africa and support economic sanctions against the country. In response, South Africa has been accused of directing military and economic attacks against the Frontline States.

Here in America, the Reverend Jackson is among the leaders in the fight against South African apartheid. "Our country at its best feeds the hungry," he states. "Our country at its worst — at its worst! — will have partnership with South Africa. It's a moral disgrace!"

Stetsasonic agrees. Group leader Daddy-O says, "We felt that the youth — and also the adults — of America should know about this, so we contributed in the best way we know how, by talking about the situation on a record."

The record itself boasts modern, hard-rocking rap rhythms and vocals spiced up by the drumming of Nigerian master Babatunde Olatunji. The lyrics, which are frankly educational, name the individual countries and their leaders, and go on to sketch out the particular problems faced by each country.

The song's climax then drives home the most important point: "South Africa no free, neither are we; Those are our brothers and sisters across the sea; I'm speaking for the STET and we make a plea; To fight apartheid, everybody!"

The dazzling music video of the song was directed by Hart Pery (who also had a hand in the creation of the award-winning "Sun City" video) and features footage of the leaders of the Frontline States, of the violence in South Africa, of the Reverend Jackson rapping out the lyrics of the song, and of Stetsasonic performing "A.F.R.I.C.A." at a huge anti-apartheid rally in Washington, D.C., this past April, with the U.S. Capitol looming in the background. It also features maps of the area, and the spelling of the names of the countries involved.

All royalties from the sale of "A.F.R.I.C.A." go directly to the Africa Fund for humanitarian relief projects for the people of the Frontline States — the same organization which handled the proceeds from "Sun City."



The Rev. Jesse Jackson joins rap band Stetsasonic for "A.F.R.I.C.A.," a song which calls for unity in the fight against apartheid. Photo by Kristin Callahan