

# NATIONAL

## Drums In The Global Village

### The Media And Racial Bias: A Long Term Problem

This week's column is a commentary by Washington, D.C.-based writer/public relations worker Matt Bratschi. He is a contributing editor to Freedom Magazine, and investigative Journal of the Church of Scientology. Incidentally, Bratschi is white. -TSB

**BY MATT BRATTSCHI**

Ethnic bias and prejudice against African Americans are problems that have plagued the advance of positive race relations for a long time. The media, both print and electronic, have been exposed many times as instigators of problems between the races. Numerous major papers have been condemned for articles or editorials that have shown bias. For example, The Detroit Free Press, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, The New Haven Register, The Washington Post and The Chicago Sun-Times, among others, have all received criticism for unfair portrayals of African Americans.

that 48 percent of African Americans are not satisfied with the way their local newspapers cover the African-American community. Also, the poll found that 47 percent of African Americans in the survey felt the print media contributes to poor race relations. "Racial bias definitely exists," according to Lawanza Spears, city editor of The Washington Afro-American newspaper. "All papers have exhibited some bias."

Jackie Jones, vice president for print of the national Association of Black Journalists, said that "every paper has egregious examples of bias in their coverage. Also, some of them [the articles] are wonderful."

In last February's issue of Emerge Magazine, Lee A. Daniels wrote in his article entitled, "The American Way: Blame a Black Man," that there are "some media people who are not ashamed to proclaim their racist ideas."

One example of a journalist who has exhibited racial bias is Richard Leiby, a writer for The Washington Post.

Recently, in an article called "Suspicious Minds," Leiby wrote that life now "seems precarious. We crave simplicity. White men in particular feel excluded, put upon, downsized."

Jones said Leiby's statement was a "reaction" to the current downsizing of employment pools in the media in general. "When one group has all the cards and some of the cards are taken away, it gives a feel of discrimination," she said. "Anything perceived to hurt them sparks this reaction." Continued Jones: "If less than 11 percent of the jobs are being held by people of color, it doesn't mean they are taking jobs away, it just means there are fewer jobs. Women and racial minorities have been dealing with this all their lives."

A report released by the American Society of Newspaper Editors stated minority journalists only made up 10.91 percent of the total newsroom workforce last year.

According to the April 24 edition of Jet Magazine, a study commissioned by the U.S. Labor Department "counters the notion that poli-

cies designed to remedy discrimination against minorities and women have resulted in bias against whites and men."

The lack of non-whites in mass media decision-making positions has a tremendous impact on its white and non-white consumers.

Dr. Camille O. Cosby, wife of comedian/actor Bill, published a book earlier this year entitled, "Television's Imageable Influences: The Self perception of Young African-Americans." A review of this book in Jet states Cosby "maintains in this study that the persuasive negative projections promoted by media industry decision-makers are hidden forms of oppression with significant impact on self-esteem and other essential values for potential success."

Says Cosby: "the way the media distorts our differences is a covert divide-and-conquer strategy which I regard as a violation of human rights."

This "divide-and-conquer" strategy can have controversial conse-

quences. For example, Leiby, who is white, caused controversy two years ago when he wrote the following to describe his participation at an NABJ convention:

"I suddenly feel blonder, paler and more thin-lipped than I ever have in my life. I scan the roiling ballroom and count two other white faces. You want to establish your cross-cultural bonafides... and so you start dropping the 'g's on your 'ing' verbs in a phony jive--'Like I was sayin' to him'--and even trying out 'dis' and even 'yo.'

Leiby's convention article attracted the attention of The Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism at San Francisco State University. A study produced at the center entitled, "News Watch: A Critical Look at Coverage of People of Color," states: "The use of dialect and references to drinking and dancing echo the stereotypes of blacks as stupid, feckless and carefree--or Sambos--that date back to slavery," referring to Leiby's attempt to "fit in" at the black journalist's conven-

tion. Ebony Magazine, writing about Leiby's NABJ article, did not fail to mention this passage from The Washington Post writer, mentioning his flight home from the NABJ conference: "there are a dozen white faces in 'First Class,' one black... I feel like I'm already home."

So what does all of this say to all of us, black and white?

Obviously, that there is a long-term problem with bigotry and prejudice in our society. Leiby and other journalists tend to exacerbate this.

And black journalists are small in number and relatively new to the mass media game. As Jones said, "We came late to the party. There are always going to be problems in reporting."

This is a situation we all need to deal with on an individual level. A bigger problem occurs when journalists use the influence of the media in which they belong to promote their own slanted views of race. This needs to stop--today.

## Guilty Of Sex Crimes, Congressman Faces Expulsion

Congressman Mel Reynolds, found guilty of having sex with a minor and obstructing justice, was left last week to ponder whether to resign his seat, or be turned out by the voters or his own colleagues.

Reynolds, 43, sat in apparent disbelief and muttered something last week as a jury delivered an overwhelming guilty verdict on all 12 counts. He now faces a minimum four-year prison sentence.

The year-old case derailed the promising career of the black Democrat, who rose from picking cotton in his Mississippi birthplace to studying at Oxford University in England under a Rhodes scholarship to Washington.

"He is through politically," Paul Green, a political analyst at Governor's State University, said. "No Afro-American figure is going to rally to his side -- especially not Jesse Jackson since his son (Jesse Jackson Jr.) is planning to run for the seat." Reynolds may hold onto the seat for as long as possible given that he is deeply in debt and being a congressman pays an annual salary of \$133,600. He is also under federal investigation for campaign financial irregularities that allegedly involve mingling campaign and personal funds.

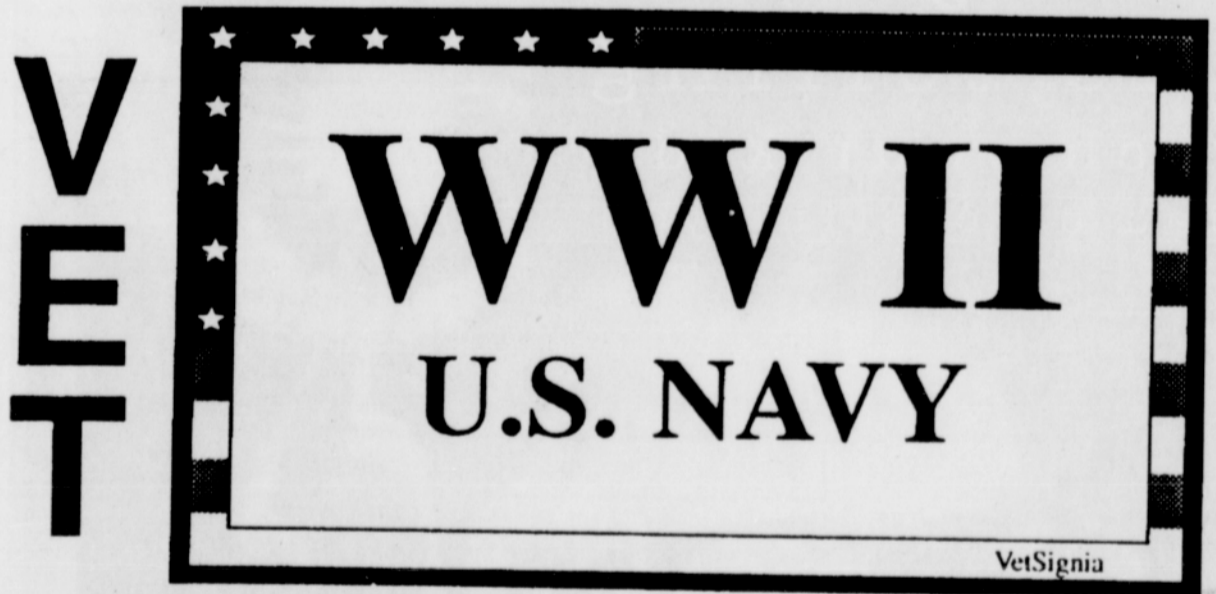
"Given his financial problems, he may stick it out as long as he can," Green said. "How much more humil-

iated can he get?" Congress ousting one of its own members is a historical rarity, with the last case in 1980 when Rep. Michael Myers, a Pennsylvania Democrat, was expelled for taking bribes.

No decision on Reynolds is expected until after House members return from their summer recess on Sept. 6.

Unless he is expelled, Reynolds, will remain a member of the House for the rest of his term through 1996 and could even run for re-election. He was first elected to Congress in 1992, beating the virulent Gus Savage in his third try at the state's second congressional district representing Chicago's South Side.

## New Stickers Pay Tribute To Veterans



A group of retired veterans has devised new and useful window stickers that allow men and women who served in the military to display the war they were involved in and their branch of service.

VetSignia Window Stickers are two by four inches, black on silver metalized film, with an American flag background. Twenty-six different stickers are available; for four major wars, WWII, Korea, Vietnam,

Persian Gulf, and five services, Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard. For example a sticker could read; WWII/U.S. Army, Korea/U.S. Marines or Vietnam/U.S. Air Force. Veterans who served in peacetime can get a sticker that shows the branch of service.

"The idea came up during a vet's bull session," says Bob Kline, a WWII Marine who distributes the stickers. "We were brainstorming about how

we could help veterans receive recognition on more than just a few special holidays.

The sticker lets the Veteran say; Hey, I did it when it had to be done and I'm proud that I did."

Sticker requests should include; name, address, war served in, branch of service. Cost \$4 each 3/\$10 (S&H Incl.). Send to - Bob Kline, Distr., Box 382, Blue Bell, PA 19422. Phone (610) 277-1171 Fax 277-3883.

## New Windows Brings High Expectations

Microsoft's ballyhooed Windows 95 computer operating system hit the street with a bang last week but Attorney General Janet Reno dampened the hoopla by affirming an antitrust probe of the software giant was continuing.

Microsoft's stock price eased following Reno's comment, but beyond Wall Street and Washington the mood was decidedly more upbeat as customers rushed to buy about one of the most widely anticipated products ever.

Computer retailers, manufacturers, and software developers anx-

iously awaited initial sales reports, hoping that the new version of Windows, delayed more than eight months, can meet expectations inflated by weeks of extensive media publicity.

One prominent research firm in Silicon Valley, Dataquest Inc., said it expected 14 million personal computers with the new software to ship in the next few weeks and projected Microsoft would sell 30 million units of the software by the end of the year.

But Microsoft's vast market reach has also been under the scrutiny of the Justice Department, which

is continuing to examine whether the company's online computer network launched with Windows 95 violates antitrust laws.

Just last week, Microsoft agreed to alter some of its business practices in another antitrust settlement with the Justice Department, but online services are still worried about its entry into their budding industry.

Microsoft rivals Apple Computer Inc. and IBM went on the offensive, launching ad campaigns denouncing Windows 95 as old, tired technology.

## Jesse Performs For New Ronald McDonald House



Pictured left to right: Jesse, Underworld/Capitol Records; Susan Sullivan, President of Loyola Caring Place/Ronald McDonald, Dr. Craig Anderson, Chairman of Pediatrics & Board of Directors.

Underworld/Capitol Records artist Jesse recently performed for the Grand Opening of the Caring Place at Loyola, a Ronald McDonald House serving the western suburbs of Chicago. The third Ronald McDonald House (A/K/A the caring Place at Loyola) provides families with housing and emotional support while their children are being treated for serious illnesses at Loyola University Med-

ical Center or other nearby hospitals.

Jesse is the first artist on the Hughes Brothers' label, Underworld Records, (a joint venture with Capitol Records). Jesse's debut LP Never Let You Go is an album of love, focusing on the principles of honesty, communication, understanding and commitment. The first single "When U Cry, I Cry" reached number 34\* on Billboard's "Hot R&B Singles" chart. Look out for Jesse's

second single and video "Baby, Baby, Baby." The video was directed by the Hughes Brothers, who directed and produced the upcoming Hollywood Pictures release Dead Presidents. Jesse will also be featured on the forthcoming Dead Presidents soundtrack along with labelmate Trina B, singing a remake of Roberta Flack's and Donny Hathaway's R&B classic "Where Is The Love."

## Libel Payoff Bodes Ill For Journalism

ABC's settlement of a \$10 billion libel suit brought by two tobacco giants over a report accusing them of raising cigarette nicotine levels bodes ill for journalism, according to free speech experts.

They said they feared the move is part of an emerging pattern by the corporations that own news organizations to make decisions based on money rather than defending the accuracy of their stories.

"As you get more and more corporate owners there is only one thing they care about... satisfying the shareholders. ABC gave in because they had to, it was a money decision. It had nothing to do with journalism," said Stephen Isaacs, who teaches ethics at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.

"This is part of a pattern. Investigative journalism, in my opinion, is dying in this country," he said. "The bigger the corporation, you would think it could sustain problems, but it is not working out that way."

ABC News settled the huge libel suit Monday by publicly apologizing for a report carried last year by its Day One newsmagazine show that Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds add-

ed extra nicotine to their cigarettes to addict smokers. ABC also agreed to pay the tobacco companies' legal costs. But the carefully worded apology said ABC believed the primary focus of the story was correct. The producer of the show, which has since been taken off the air, and the correspondent on the story refused to sign the agreements.

Since the libel suit was filed, Walt Disney Co. has agreed to buy Capital Cities/ABC Inc. in a \$19 billion deal. Some lawyers said they were surprised that ABC had given in at a time when documents have been surfacing that appear to support the report. Also, just a few weeks ago the Food and Drug Administration began its first efforts to regulate cigarettes, citing evidence that tobacco companies can control the amount of nicotine in cigarettes. The tobacco companies have sued the FDA to block regulation of cigarette sales and are lobbying Congress for support.

Lawyers believe they will try to use the ABC settlement to advance this campaign.

"It's an odd situation. Factually, certainly the core of the story was

accurate. The ambiguous apology underscores that," said Jane Kirtley, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

"I'm very bothered by the notion that a major media organization would allow itself to appear to be intimidated by a major corporation," she said. "This bodes ill for the future of investigative reporting involving corporate entities... it's not just a question of Philip Morris versus ABC, it's corporate American versus the news media."

Richard Winfield, a prominent media lawyer with New York's Rogers & Wells, said he did not think there was any pattern of news organizations bowing to corporations.

"Frankly, I haven't encountered in my practice clients selling out their professionals in the name of economics. I doubt it (a pattern) exists," he said.

Laurence Tribe, a constitutional law professor at Harvard University who has worked on anti-smoking cases, said he thought ABC's settlement would make journalists even more determined to investigate corporations.