

Opinion

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Wake-up call for broadcast industry

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Over the past eleven weeks the more than five million listeners of the Tom Joyner syndicated radio show heard Joyner and the show's political commentator, Tavis Smiley, talk about black economic power and the lack of respect that too many corporations have for our community. As a case in point, Joyner and Smiley focused on CompUSA, the computer and computer supplies retail chain, which has done little or no advertising in the black community despite the millions of dollars spent there by African American consumers. Joyner and Smiley wanted to meet with CompUSA President James Halpin to talk about that, but Halpin stonewalled the Joyner show and refused to talk.

Week before last it all came to a head when ABC Radio, which syndicates the Joyner show to some 99 markets nationally, threatened to take the Joyner show off the air unless they stopped their campaign against CompUSA. ABC officials allegedly had been threatened with a law suit by CompUSA, which CompUSA denies. Finally, after being deluged with calls, faxes and e-mails from Joyner listeners, ABC and CompUSA both backed off and Halpin even appeared on the Joyner show himself. Whatever happened behind the scenes, the real learning for African Americans and other people of color as we go in to the 21st century—the information age where communications and technology will be ever more important—is that we can no longer allow others to take control of our information sources and our access to technology.

Fact 1: Of the 1,524 commercial radio and television stations in the U.S., only 337 are owned by people of color. While the number of commercial television stations rose slightly between 1997-1998, the number owned by people of color decreased.

Fact 2: Black ownership of commercial radio and television has not kept pace with the industry and is losing ground. Access to capital remains one of the most significant impediments, particularly in a rapidly consolidating industry where fewer owners own more broadcast outlets.

Fact 3: Since the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which directed the Federal Communications Commission to "eliminate the national multiple ownership rule and relax the local ownership rule," there has been a

rapid consolidation of ownership, higher station prices and more competition for advertising revenues. Indeed, the broadcasting industry is now dominated by non-minority owned companies that own three or more stations in one market, giving them more power to hire the best staff and to buy nationally syndicated programming. It is not inconceivable that many black-owned radio stations could not afford to buy the Tom Joyner show, for example.

Fact 4: Other communities of color are in the same situation, or worse. The nation currently has only one native American broadcast station owner. In the year 1997-98 there was a loss of 15 Hispanic commercial broadcast station owners. Asian broadcasters lost one of three owners.

Fact 5: The most established television owners of color are selling their stations and almost two-thirds of commercial radio stations owned by people of color are single station owners in a world which is rapidly changing. With the consolidation of radio ownership and the higher station prices, increased competition for both radio and television stations, there are fewer new owners of color entering the market.

The question for our communities, then, must be, can we allow ourselves to become disenfranchised in the information age by huge companies which own the radio and broadcast stations in our community? ABC radio, for example, is in the top ten largest radio groups in the nation, owning some 29 stations with a revenue of over \$300 million in 1997. With that kind of power, they believed they could threaten Tom Joyner, and it was only because of his steadfastness and refusal to buckle under, that our community was able to force CompUSA to talk to us and take us seriously.

If you're concerned about the fate of minority-owned radio and television stations, then you must stand up and be counted. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which is chaired by an African American, needs to hear voices of protest and concern from our communities. It's about politics and it's about economics. It's about respect and it's about power. Maybe it's a wake-up call for us all about who owns the media in our communities.

(You can write the Federal Communications Commission at 445 12th Street SW, Washington, DC 20554 or call (202) 418-0190.)

Elvis, Hitler, or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?

By EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

If the voting booth closed and the ballots were counted today for Time Magazine's "Person of the Century" either Elvis Presley or Adolph Hitler would be runaway vote getters over Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both men each have nearly doubled the number of votes that King has gotten for Time Magazine's top spot.

Since Time announced its national poll for "Person of the Century" earlier this year, King's vote total has barely budged. The editors insist that the poll is just that, a poll, and they will make and announce their final selection in December. But the fact that he has barely made the top ten list tells much about how little the towering contributions King has made to the movements for social change in this century are appreciated.

A King selection for the top spot should have less to do with what the editors at Time think about him than what the millions globally who have benefited from the movements for civil rights, peace and justice think about him. Still, Time's "Person of the Century" derby is a priceless opportunity to educate young persons and remind adults of King's eternal legacy of peace and social justice and the need to continue the struggle to fulfill that legacy.

Yet King's contributions remain in mortal danger of being shoved to the wayside of history. Much of the public tightly labels him as a "black leader," a civil rights leader, or say that he simply imitated Gandhi. These are huge myths. King certainly was a staunch practitioner of Gandhi's tactics of non-violent resistance and non-accommodation to injustice. But he took his teacher's message and refined, broadened and stretched it into a global moral imperative for all humankind. That moral imperative stretched way beyond the limits of the civil rights movement.

When he formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, King staked out the moral high ground for the infant modern day civil rights movement. It was classic

good versus evil. Many white Americans were sickened by the gory news scenes of baton wielding racist Southern sheriffs, firehouses, police dogs, and Klan violence unleashed against peaceful black protesters.

King made it possible, even obligatory, for millions of persons throughout the world to condemn racial segregation as immoral and indefensible. The civil rights movement spurred students and workers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to oppose the military strongmen, dictators and demagogues in their countries. He inspired liberation priests in Latin America, and student demonstrators in Europe. He deeply influenced the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa. Nelson Mandela has repeatedly said that he owes a profound debt of gratitude to King. Mandela is not the only major leader to say that. Caesar Chavez, a leader much deserving of praise and gratitude for his selfless contributions to peace and social justice, made his greatest mark as champion of the farmworkers and labor organizing battles. Nearly all of the main anti-war leaders expressed their debt of gratitude to King. They recognized that his brave and outspoken opposition to the Vietnam War and militarism gave a huge boost to the anti-war movement. The leaders of the gay rights, and women's movements also owe a debt of gratitude to King. They too were inspired by him and borrowed heavily from the tactics of the civil rights movement.

With due respect to Elvis, and (ugh) Hitler, this is what we should tell the editors at Time Magazine when they pick their "Person of the Century." Time Magazine Email: letters@time.com Fax: 212-522-8949 Earl Ofari Hutchinson is a nationally syndicated columnist and the director of the National Alliance for Positive Action. On October 27, the National Alliance held a Martin Luther King "Person of the Century" Walk. The group called for similar walks and commemoration in other cities between October 27 and 30 to urge everyone to tell Time Magazine to

make King the "Person of the Century." Email: ehutchi344@aol.com

Using older women as a front

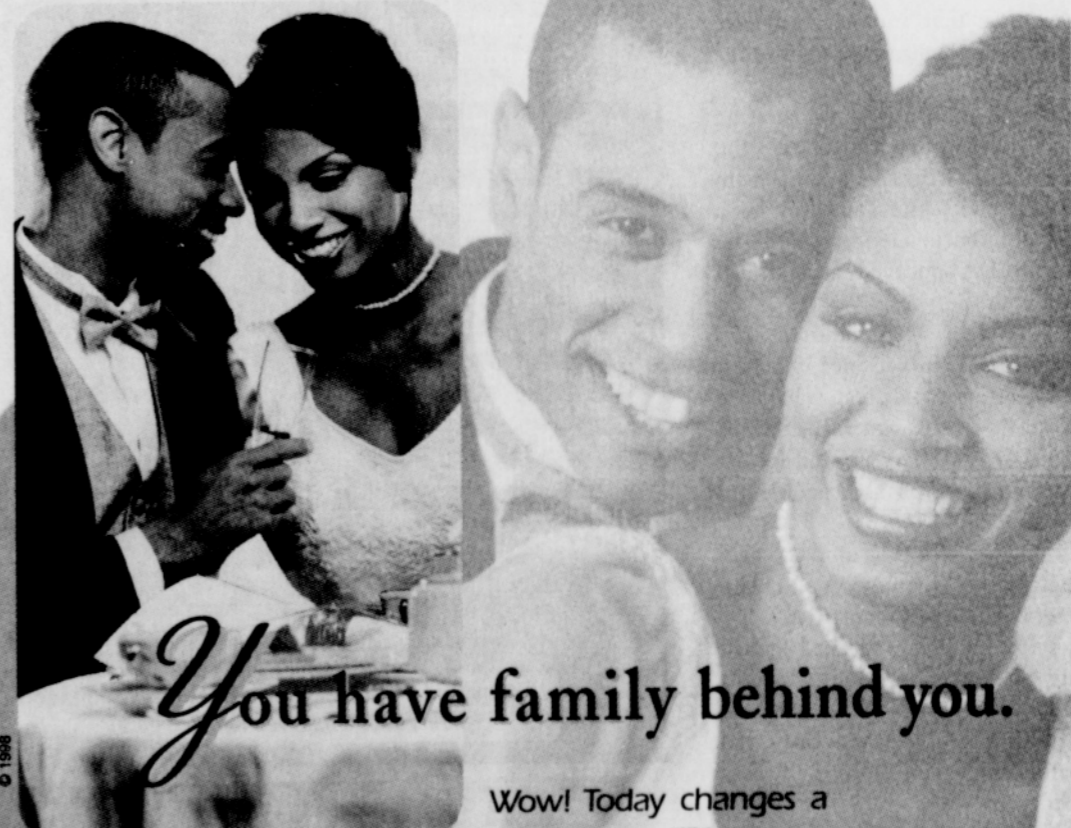
By MARTHA BURK
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Older women may think they should be feeling pretty good these days; both the government and advocacy groups have suddenly discovered them. First we have "Flo," a fictional character popping up on TV screens to lobby against including prescription coverage under Medicare. Flo is sponsored by a pharmaceutical industry front-group calling itself Citizens for a Better Medicare. The so-called "citizens" in the group include the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association (Pharma), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association of Manufacturers. Real seniors' groups are so upset about this sham that they have organized picket lines against Pharma, just to let people know their concern for the bottom line—not the plight of older women—is the driving force behind Flo's claim that she doesn't want government in her medicine cabinet.

The Clinton administration is also targeting older women with its message that we must "save Social Security first," instead of granting a big tax cut to rich Americans who don't need it. Trouble is some of the proposals being considered by the Administration wouldn't exactly help older women. One trail balloon is a proposal to eliminate the earnings test for workers below the full benefit age. (Current law reduces Social Security payments for workers 62 to 64 who earn more than \$9600 per year.) While this looks like a good deal at first, the net result will be more women who are poor in their old-old age. Here's how it would play out: workers below 65 would be more likely to claim their Social Security benefits early (and as a result get a reduced benefit for life) if there were no earnings test. This would be fine so long as the earnings were coming in, but the reduced benefit would really start to pinch when folks were no longer able to work, and the extra money no longer available. The lifetime reduction in benefits in exchange for a few years elimination of the earnings test would be especially hard on women, since they live longer than men and become more reliant on Social Security as they grow older.

The National Council of Women's Organizations, a coalition of more than 100 national groups representing upwards of six million women, has flatly told the White House that eliminating the earnings test would be bad for women. And it's also easy to see that the 7 in 10 Medicare beneficiaries living below the poverty line who are women could use a prescription benefit in their coverage. But the question is, who's listening? With an election year coming up, only time will tell whether older women have truly been identified as a group we should all care about. It could be they have only been "discovered" as useful to lobbyists pushing the latest corporate propaganda, or "discovered" for use as poster girls by a scandalized presidency in its last attempt to leave a legacy—even if it harms the majority of older Americans.

Martha Burk is a political psychologist who head the Center for Advancement of Public Policy in Washington, DC, a think tank focusing on the wisdom of providing for more equal treatment of women in society.



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