

# OPINION

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## Divisive Patterns, Practices in the Media

### Issue far larger than an isolated verbal assault

BY CAROLYN CHEEKS KILPATRICK

I was one of a small delegation of leaders who met with executives at NBC and CBS (over Don Imus' racist comments). During both meetings, we discussed the dire need for increased dialogue and the importance of constructing meaningful partnerships to combat divisive patterns and practices in mass media.

From the onset of this debate, I have maintained the issue is far larger than an isolated verbal assault. All Americans have the right to free speech. We should not allow individuals to misuse and abuse their positions in the media to publicly castigate and denigrate others. We must promote a culture of change to eradicate racially and sexually degrading and other discriminatory depictions in the

media. We can accomplish this by pushing networks to increase opportunities for minorities and women, supporting ethnic media, and advocating for change in government.

We must demand that networks and other media organizations implement policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion. We need to ensure that these companies provide minorities and women with employment opportunities that increase their numbers not only in front of the camera, but also in decision-making positions behind the camera. We must work



in collaboration with colleges and universities to offer training, mentoring, internship, and scholarship programs that encourage minorities and women to pursue careers in the media.

There are more than 1,000 publications targeted at women and minorities in the United States. We must sup-

port these organizations! For 180 years, black publications have documented the African American story and continue to make sure the world is aware of the African American experience. The multicultural media serves as a vital source of information

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While we must work with networks and other media organizations to ensure minority and female representation, we must also generate avenues through which we can create

and control our images. We must fight to remove barriers to media ownership. We must work to change existing rules that regulate the industry, because the government is the true gatekeeper to providing equal opportunities for media ownership.

According to a recent study commissioned by Free Press, a national nonpartisan media research organization, women comprise 51 percent of the U.S. population, but own only 4.97 percent of all broadcast stations. Additionally, minorities represent 33 percent of the entire population, but own only 3.26 percent of all broadcast stations. While female and minority ownership has increased in other sectors of the marketplace, it has declined in the broadcast industry. I have asked the Federal Communications Commission to re-evaluate the agency's current rules and their impact on minority ownership.

As a sixth term member of Congress and current Chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, an organization that represents more than 40 million Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, I have supported—and will continue to support—increased opportunities for all minorities and women in mass media.

Diversity is America's strength. We must teach our children and grandchildren to celebrate and appreciate our differences. We must help them understand that all people have value and deserve respect. We must come together and use our differences to address our collective challenges if we are serious about preserving the American Dream and building stronger families, healthier communities, and a united America.

Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick is serving her sixth term as the U. S. Representative for Michigan's 13th District.

## Guns Do Kill But stiffer laws would make it more difficult

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

Guns don't kill, people do. This pro-gun slogan, at first, seems to speak truth. But the statement is only partially true.

Take the recent shootings at Virginia Tech: a disturbed young man kills 31 people and wounds several more before taking his own life. Prior to the shootings, he'd legally purchased two weapons and 19 rounds of ammunition, despite court orders to seek psychiatric counseling and several harassment complaints filed against him. While he was ultimately responsible for making the decision to aim and pull the trigger, widespread gun availability made



it quite easy for this troubled soul to kill another person.

Gun control can't put an end to senseless murders - we'll have to also change the hearts and minds of individuals. But stiffer laws that make it difficult for would-be killers to get guns can help.

Federal law prohibits gun purchases by people convicted of serious crimes, committed to mental institutions against their will, convicted of domestic violence and others. While states provide records of convictions and other incidents that disqualify a gun purchase to FBI databases that are used for background checks, serious psychiatric disorders are not reported.

According to the FBI, about half the states don't report such disorders. They aren't required to.

So, even though the Virginia Tech shooter had once been

*"We can thank the National Rifle Association for these lax gun laws that allow madmen to legally purchase weapons."*

declared a "threat" to himself and others by a judge, when he purchased both of his weapons, the quickie background check - it takes less than three minutes - came back clean.

We can thank the National

Rifle Association for these lax gun laws that allow madmen to legally purchase weapons. The NRA is the largest gun-supporting lobby in the country; it has more than 3 million mem-

bers and it spends millions of dollars each year, pumping money into the pockets of politicians and fighting any laws that may restrict access to guns.

The NRA does not support any legislation that will prohibit

an individual from buying a gun or that will make guns unattractive to buyers. Child safety locks on guns, the elimination of semi-automatic weapons, a waiting period on gun purchases; the NRA has lobbied against all of these laws.

The group would have us believe that there is no proof gun control prevents crime. But restricting gun access to individuals who are likely to commit crimes would help.

Requiring states to report psychiatric disorders to FBI databases is a place to start. Call your local legislator, ask them to create and advocate for laws that require states to do just that. You can make a difference. With the 2008 elections fast approaching, gun control is likely to become a hot cam-

aign issue. And then ask them to support the National Violent Death Reporting System. Among other things, NVDRS tracks gun deaths. With more data, gun control advocates will be able to strengthen their arguments. While they may never match the NRA in dollars, they will be able to beat them with the data.

We can't legislate our way out of society's problems. But we can, with laws that consider the well being of the country's citizens, begin to stem some of the senseless violence that has taken far too many lives.

Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of the Rainbow Push and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

### Apology Only the First Step

### Reparations and restitution

BY WILLIAM DARITY JR.

The few states which have recently offered an apology for slavery and the system of Jim Crow have only taken the first step to

ward healing the wounds of racial inequality.

There is an additional step that needs to be taken, which is restitution.

Members of Congress have sponsored a bill that would provide restitution to the elderly survivors of the Tulsa Race Riot of

1921, one of many -- perhaps the most drastic -- acts of white terrorism that consolidated conditions of racial inequality throughout the United States while destroying property and prosperity attained by black Americans.

Other instances of white mob violence with similar conse-

quences occurred in Colfax, La., in 1873; Danville, Va., in 1883; Wilmington, N.C., in 1898; Atlanta in 1906; Springfield, Ill., in 1908; and Rosewood, Fla., in 1923.

These riots were part of the very fabric of enforcement of the Jim Crow regime and, like both slavery and Jim Crow, have had an impact that spans generations to the present.

It's especially pleasing to see state legislatures in Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina offer apologies, but compensatory measures are necessary.

The apologies would be

strengthened by acknowledgment of the damage and harm engendered by ongoing racial discrimination in employment, education, political participation and access to wealth.

The starting point should be the formation of a commission of the type proposed for many years by Congressman John Conyers to examine

the long-term effects of slavery, Jim Crow and ongoing discrimination on American society.

William Darity Jr. is professor of African and African American Studies and economics at Duke University.



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