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‘Ambitious While Black’ is No Crime

Multnomah County Commissioner Loretta Smith apparently works too hard and spends too much on her constituents. Is that a sin?

According to a recent news article, Smith’s office has sponsored more county tables at nonprofit events than any other commissioner. She’s attended too many national conferences and spent too much on hotel rooms.

All of this money, by the way, came out of the expense budget for her office –the same amount that all the commissioners get. Smith could have spent it on staff. Instead, she sponsors community nonprofits and brings food to events serving some of the county’s most needy families.

Smoking gun: Smith spent \$2,000 to support a program for Black youth through the National Association of Black County Officials. The organization gives scholarships to Black youth entering government service and helps counties around the coun-

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try— including Multnomah County –improve education and career prospects for Black boys and men. The donation was allowed under

This city would benefit from more capable people of color in government that take risks. Loretta Smith has shown herself to be both capable and committed to public service

county rules.

Smith’s expense claims have been put under the microscope. But is it really wrong to pay your \$50 bar tab with the same card you’re using for other expenses, so long as you pay it back when

you get home?

That’s not corruption. It’s human nature. I’d bet most of us have done something similar.

What’s a commissioner to do?

Is she supposed to represent Multnomah County by staying in the YWCA? Stay home? I guess Portland has nothing to learn from cities like Atlanta, Memphis and Washington DC. Smith

her detractors say, that everything she does must be self-serving and self-promoting.

It’s laughable. This city would benefit from more capable people of color in government that take risks. Smith has shown herself to be both capable and committed to public service. That should be commended not attacked. Being Ambitious While Black is not a crime.

It’s the Tall Poppy syndrome. Whenever somebody stands above the crowd they must be cut down. Smith is spending more than the other commissioners on certain work-related expenses. Therefore, small minds imagine she must be doing something wrong.

We don’t support everything Commissioner Smith says and does.

But we are not going to fault her for working harder than almost any other elected official to support her constituents. That’s why we elected her. Her record is clean.

Mo’ne Davis: Young, Gifted, and Abused

In the course of one week we witnessed the burden of being young, gifted and Black.

First, the Little League baseball phenom Mo’ne Davis was insulted by a White college baseball player who called the abundantly talented young girl a ‘slut’ in a Tweet in response to news that Disney was planning to make a movie about her incredible rise to fame. The player, Joey Casselberry, quickly retracted the tweet in the face of a wave of criticism in cyberspace but was promptly dismissed by the Bloomsburg University team.

Then there were the toxic tweets from Jenna and Jacque Huggins, the daughters of West Virginia head basketball coach Bob Huggins, calling Maryland basketball player Dez Wells a rapist. The West Virginia team defeated Maryland in an early round of the NCAA championship tournament. The Terrapins star guard had been kicked off the Xavier University team in 2012 after being accused of sexual assault. A grand jury decided charges against Wells were not warranted and he later settled a lawsuit he brought against Xavier.

Not far from the Morgantown campus of the University of West Virginia and College Park home of the University of Maryland, a young, Black University of Virginia undergraduate student was accosted by police. Martese Johnson had his face bashed into the pavement and bloodied by Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) agents outside a pub near the UVA campus. The episode was captured on videotape. Johnson had proper ID and was not resisting arrest when



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the ABC agents pummeled him, causing injuries that required 10 stitches in his head.

What these three incidents have in common is obvious – Mo’ne Davis, Dez Wells and Martese

Johnson are all young and Black. Lurking just beyond the obvious tie is the quality of their blackness – they are all gifted and confident in their identities. It seems in 21st century America to be young, gifted and Black is now a crime; an offense against society’s typecasting of Black youth as violent, unintelligent and worthless.

By succeeding, these young people frustrate those who harbor bias and leave them little room to fully exercise their demons

empowers the perpetrator. The police involved in the micro-aggression at the University of Virginia? They were acting under the assumption of “Black threat” and sending a message in the process.

This is the cruel joke played upon Black youth in America. The public message communicated to young Black women and men is to pursue excellence and rise above challenges, and be exemplary in their civic lives. That message is countered by the aural and visual assault upon their sensibilities that reduces them to thugged out and hyper-sexualized caricatures. When young Blacks rise above this stereotyping, they are then reduced to racial objects, ridiculed

for being audacious in their success.

Mo’ne Davis was a “slut” in the eyes of a young White male because he believes her success is undeserving of the attention it is receiving. The privileged White daughters of a basketball coach of a major university made the determination a grand jury could not, on a charge a university could not prove and was forced to reach settlement with the accused.

Still, Dez Wells is branded a rapist because he excelled on the basketball court. Martese Johnson was just another young Black guy, a human punching bag for police who could casually dismiss the thought that they were bloodying a student enrolled in the nearby prestigious university, or more importantly, a human being and someone’s son.

Collectively, these incidents bring into sharper focus the racist rants of former University of Oklahoma SAE fraternity members in that now infamous videotape. This is the world in which young Black Americans live. It is a sobering reality that a generation that many hoped would truly be post-racial (as if that will ever be the case) is more deeply entrenched in racism than the prior generation. And institutional racism has a vice grip upon young Blacks that is more consequential than white mobs of decades past.

It’s enough to make me take a trip to the nearest Starbucks. I’ll take a latte with some truth talk.

Walter Fields is Executive Editor of NorthStarNews.com.