

EDITORIALS • COMMENTS • OPINIONS

Black Assistant Coach Says White Wife Hampers Promotion

By George E Curry
NNPA Columnist

The University of Florida’s football team made a statement last week when it defeated the University of Oklahoma 24-14 and was declared national champion for the second time in three years. Charlie Strong, the African-American defensive coordinator who kept the Sooners far below their 54 points a game average, made an even louder statement when he declared that despite all of his success at Florida, he has been passed over for head coaching positions because of his interracial marriage.

“Everybody always said I didn’t get that job because my wife was white,” Strong told a columnist for the Orlando Sentinel. He added, “If you think about it, a coach is standing up there representing the university. If you’re not strong enough to look through that (interracial marriage) then you have an issue.”

Strong’s assertion caught many by surprise. When you look at African-American sports figures – including Charles Barkley and Tiger Woods – many have White wives. So do many big time Black coaches, including Lovie Smith of the Chicago Bears. Interracial couples are so commonplace in athletics that one would be forgiven if he or she thought it was a requirement for Blacks participating at the top echelon of sports.

There is no doubt that interracial couples are less of a social taboo today than they were just two decades ago. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2003, more than three-quarters of all adults – 77 percent – said it is “all right for blacks and whites to date each other.” In 1987, that figure was only 48 percent.

But Coach Strong’s allegation speaks to a more subtle point. From the days of the Founding Fathers, White males have never objected to interracial liaisons. You can look at the complexion of

any group of African-Americans and see that racial lines have been blurred. White men, ranging from the supposedly enlightened Thomas Jefferson to segregationist Strom Thurmond, have had children by Black women, often against their will. The objection has been to the voluntary union between Black men and White women. That has been particularly true in the Deep South.

Gunnar Myrdal’s landmark “American Dilemma,” written in the mid-1940s, observed the South’s “fixation on the purity of white womanhood.” Myrdal explained, “The South has an obsession with sex which helps to make this region quite irrational in dealing with Negroes generally...”

In the Matter of Color, a book written by retired U.S. Appeals Court Judge A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., notes that if a free Black man had sexual relations with a White woman in South Carolina during the Colonial period, he would automatically lose his freedom.

In 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy from Chicago, was murdered near Money, Miss. for allegedly whistling at a White woman. Although his killers later bragged about killing young Till, they were never convicted.

Until 1966, interracial marriages were illegal in 16 states. That year, in the case of Loving v. Virginia, which involved a marriage between a White man and a Black woman, the United States Supreme Court invalidated anti-miscegenation laws.

According to the Census Bureau, the number of interracial marriages remain relatively small, increasing from less than 1 percent in 1970 to slightly more than 5 percent in 2000. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2005 found that more than one-fifth of all Americans – 22 percent – say they have a close relative married to someone of a different race.

So, what was the reaction to Coach Strong’s remarks on the Orlando Sentinel’s Web site?

Blah, blah, blah. I know that it is so politically correct to support inter-racial marriage as if it’s perfectly acceptable, but I am personally disgusted by it, and I know plenty of others are too. I also find it ridiculous that such a disproportionate number of these marriages involve rich and famous black males who are big in the world of music, sports, or movies. Apparently black women are not good enough for these guys once they reach a certain status in the world.

- **Fungus**

Wow Fungus. Your name is spot-on. You are a Fungus. I am a successful WHITE male, married to a beautiful, successful BLACK female, with a gorgeous little girl who is 3 and another one on the way. Sorry to disgust you, you Neanderthal, with my choice to marry a beautiful woman of a darker skin tone than Barbie. DEAL with it.

- **FreeKoffhisleash**

Stop complaining, he married that snow bunny and he knew the consequences. He is a self-hating black male, that believed he was too good to marry an educated black women.

- **I’m Glad**

... We have some white haters, and some black haters that say the dude shouldn’t have married a white girl. Maybe Coach Strong should say “Thank you Mr. White man for the job that I have, and I enjoy your smell.” White man takes us out the jungle and look how we repay him, by creating rap music, dating white women and voting!

- **Ol’ Balls Coach**

Maybe we haven’t made as much progress in this area as we were led to believe.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach.

Not A Crime, But An Illness: Black Folk And Depression

By Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

Words cannot contain my admiration for Terrie Williams, a sister who has put her pain on “front street” with her book, Black Pan – It Just Looks Like We Aren’t Hurting (Schribner, 2008) and reminded all of us that depression is not a crime, but an illness.

Her foundation, the Stay Strong Foundation (www.staystrong-foundation.com) has been committed to lifting up the matter of depression and teaching us to treat the illness as just that, a source of healing, not of shame.

This week, while the nation is enraptured in inaugural euphoria, Terrie Williams and her organization are a stark reminder that life goes on. On Thursday, January 15, on Dr. Martin Luther King’s birthday, she is holding an event in New York that will focus on the issue of depression – what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like. There’s an Internet video that gives you a taste of the movement and an indication of the folk who are supporting it.

Rev. Al Sharpton, Susan Taylor, Ruby Dee, Mo’Nique, Jeff Johnson, Terrie McMillan and others are among those lifting their voices to encourage black people to explore their pain.

Terrie says that some of our depression is a function of our slave legacy. We had to hold it in – our affection, our pain, our disappointment, because feeling allowed others to exploit our weakness.

We did not show affection, even, to our children; for fear that they would be sold away from us. That holding in has been passed

down to the point when some black folks believe that you can pray your way out of a clinical condition. To be sure, prayer works, but sometimes prayer works with therapy, medication, or recognition.

Terrie Williams is candid about her own depression and they ways she handled it. She is extremely transparent about her resistance to therapy, to medication, and the ways that she felt she could fix her illness herself.

And then she is candid about her path to health and healing, and in her book she shares that path with others. Additionally, she interviews others who care to be candid and transparent about their stories, and though their voices, she gives other people permission to own and acknowledge their own pain and ways to heal it.

This is a good time to talk about depression and pain, especially as the economy inflicts external pressures on all of our well being. With an unemployment rate recently reported at 7.2 percent, or 11.9 percent for African Americans, we know that the “real deal” is about 13.5 percent for the overall population (since we don’t count those folk who stopped looking for work, or those who work part time and really want to work full time), and about 20 percent (or 1 in 5) for African Americans.

That’s enough to make the strongest person discouraged, especially if she is one of the ones out of work, or facing economic challenges. That external trigger may make a person sad, angry, frustrated, and even frightened. And then it might also tip someone over the edge to depression. Williams would suggest looking at both the internals and the externals.

How much of your reaction is “about you”? How much is about external conditions? Can you separate them?

Rich folk are killing themselves because they can’t face the consequences of poor investments. They can’t imagine life without means. The mythology of African-American resilience suggests that we don’t kill ourselves over money. The mythology is partly right. The suicide rate of African-Americans was 5.25 per 100,000 people, compared to 10.75 per 100,000 people for whites. We are half as likely to kill ourselves as white folks are. Still, an unfortunate reality is that we attempt suicide almost as frequently as white people do, with about 4.1 percent of African Americans attempt suicide, compared to 4.6 percent of whites. And while history and stigma may prevent older African Americans from considering, attempting, or completing suicide, suicide was the third leading cause of death of young African Americans, those 15-24.

Ouch! We may wear that thing Terrie Williams calls the “game face”, but the data say that we are hurting.

Terrie Williams has given us permission to explore the sources of our pain. She has forcefully asserted that depression is not a crime, but an illness, nothing to be ashamed of, something to claim. Her Stay Strong Foundation is a resource, and her January 15 event is but one of a series of actions she plans to empower those in pain. So if you are hurting, get help. Terrie Williams is among those who will make sure it is available.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.

To Be Equal Column

Eartha Kitt And Freddie Hubbard

By Marc H. Morial
NNPA Columnist

Much has been written about the giant shoulders Barack Obama stands on as he prepares to become America’s first Black President.

Everyone from Abraham Lincoln and FDR to Dr. Martin Luther King has been cited as inspirations. But with the recent passing of Eartha Kitt and Freddie Hubbard over the holidays, we were reminded that Obama’s path to the White House was not only paved by the courageous lives of these great leaders but also by the transformative powers of iconic artists and entertainers.

Some might argue that there has been no more poignant or effective way of conveying the dignity of the African American experience and building bridges of understanding than through the arts.

Eartha Kitt and Freddie Hubbard may not have thought of themselves as civil rights leaders, but their powerful multi-racial appeal played a big part in raising the nation’s consciousness and giving birth to new possibilities. That is why I want to take a moment to pay homage to their memories.

It was ironic that Eartha Kitt died on Christmas day. Her most

enduring and recognizable song may have been her sultry rendition of “Santa Baby,” recorded in 1953 but now a Christmas standard.

Born in 1927, Eartha Kitt was a self-professed “sex kitten,” whose career spanned six decades. She spoke four languages, sang in seven, entertained audiences from Harlem to Paris and won international acclaim as a cabaret singer, dancer, actor and activist. Orson Welles once called her, “The most exciting woman in the world.”

Whether winning accolades as Catwoman in the 1960s Batman TV series or earning a Tony nomination for her role in the 1978 Broadway production of Timbuktu, Eartha Kitt carved a unique niche in the world of entertainment and influenced many well-known singers including Dianna Ross, Janet Jackson and Madonna.

She also left an indelible mark as an outspoken activist, who worked on issues ranging from help for homeless children to voting rights to HIV/AIDS awareness. In 1968, she was condemned for speaking out against the Vietnam War during a White House luncheon with President Johnson’s wife, Lady Bird.

Freddie Hubbard, who has been called the greatest trumpet player of all time, died on December 29th. He was 70.

A protégé of John Coltrane, Hubbard rose from humble beginnings in Indianapolis to play with the greatest jazz musicians of his time. At home in styles as varied as bebop, hardbop, and soul jazz, Hubbard may be best known for his 1977 double-album entitled, VSOP: The Quintet, in which he joined Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams in a landmark live performance.

He was a Grammy winner and in 2006 the National Endowment for the Arts honored him with their prestigious Jazz Masters Award. Freddie Hubbard made a lasting impact on the world of jazz and he influenced many younger trumpeters, including Wynton Marsalis.

The great philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Every man is a quotation from his ancestors.” As we celebrate the presidency of Barack Obama let us remember that he and all of us are quotes from a rich cultural heritage that includes the incomparable musical contributions of Eartha Kitt and Freddie Hubbard.

Marc H. Morial is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

Friends To Help You Pack?

By Nicole C. Lee
NNPA Columnist

While Washington is buzzing in preparation for the inauguration of Barack Obama, President Bush is finishing up his final acts of a...memorable presidency.

Besides the many pardons that will be granted, Bush will also be presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the U.S. to three foreign leaders. One is Alvaro Uribe, the current president of Colombia. The White House Press Secretary Dana Perino said that Uribe would be receiving the honor for “improving the lives of [his] citizens and for...efforts to promote democracy, human rights and peace.” Consistent until the end, President Bush is sending a slap in the face to human rights advocates and people of good will everywhere.

For the past few years, I have talked a lot about Colombia. A war is waging, but not the war mainstream media likes to talk about.

It is a war against the dreams and aspirations of Black Colombians and Uribe is waging it. While Bush calls Uribe America’s closest friend, Uribe has enacted policies that resulted in a humanitarian and human rights disaster.

Uribe inherited a war between government forces and left wing guerrillas, such as the FARC. In an attempt to get an upper-hand in the war against the guerrillas, the government funded paramilitary forces. The paramilitaries and the military were responsible for

unspeakable atrocities against civilians. Illicit coca cultivation on all sides has made an insane situation crazier.

Caught literally in the middle is the Black population of Colombia. Twenty-six percent of Colombians are Black; they make up the third largest population of Afro-descendants in the Western Hemisphere after Brazil and the U.S. To put it another way, there are more Black people in Colombia than Haiti. Despite the large numbers, and a vibrant civil rights movement, “Afro-Colombians” continue to be the target of human rights abuses. Many of these abuses are tied to government practices and rampant impunity.

In 1990, Afro-Colombians won a great victory in Law 70. This law basically provided the “40 acres and a mule” to Afro-Colombians in that it recognized their rights to the land traditionally populated by Afro-Colombians. Yet, since the law was enacted, the Colombian government has systematically undermined the letter and intent of the law.

For example, both the drug war and the continued fighting between armed groups have caused massive internal displacement in Colombia. At the end of last year, Colombia’s internally displaced population exceeded the displaced population in Darfur, evidence of a grave, yet overlooked humanitarian disaster.

While the U.S. provides some aid to assist the IDPs, the Colombian government has enacted laws allowing them to sell Afro-Colombian land while the owners are displaced. This has provided a

perverse incentive to some to foment conflict in Afro-Colombian areas.

Also, effecting the population is the murder of trade unionists in Colombia. According to the AFL-CIO, nearly 500 trade unionists have been murdered since Uribe took office in 2002. More union members are killed in Colombia than any other country and virtually by all other countries combined.

Many Afro-Colombian leaders are union members. Teachers have been murdered in front of their students; mothers and fathers in front of their children. This has sent a chilling effect throughout the country and serves as a warning to those fighting for worker rights that they can be targeted and killed without consequence.

None of these facts are new to President Bush. Human rights organizations across the globe have repeated these facts to the Bush Administration time and time again. Their response has been to embrace Mr. Uribe even firmer, ignoring the grim realities that face the innocent of Colombia.

To give Uribe an award is a slap in the face to democratic principles and common decency. So goodbye, President Bush. Can we help you pack your bags? Please be sure to take your friends with you. As far as I am concerned, change can’t get here soon enough.

Nicole C. Lee is the executive director of TransAfrica Forum.