

**The  
BLACK  
C o m m e n t a t o r**  
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Bruce's Beat

First Annual Lawn Jockey Awards – they're off and running  
Rep. Harold Ford and King funeral 'fabrications'  
More on 'Failures of the Black Leadership Class'  
and eMail from our readers  
by BC Associate Editor Bruce Dixon

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Early 20th Century America had its minstrel shows and other depictions of grinning, red-lipped watermelon-eating pickaninnies; its Topsy and Sambo figures in print, advertising and elsewhere. They lent comforting affirmation to white supremacist fantasies of black degradation. At the dawn of the 21st century, we have another cohort of black public figures eager to please the powers that be by debasing themselves and demeaning their black audiences. No, not the ignorant studio gangsters on BET. Well, yes, maybe them too. But today we refer to the clownish cohort of black political figures in Congress and elsewhere, determined to embarrass themselves and frustrate the principle of representative democracy by representing interests other than those of the Black Consensus which elected them.

To hold these characters up to the scorn and ridicule they deserve, it was announced in last week's column, that some of us at **BC** and CBC Monitor were thinking about holding a DC awards dinner this summer to hand out what we call the Lawn Jockey Awards, in the tradition of the eminent George Curry, whose 1996 Emerge magazine cover depicted the loathsome Clarence Thomas as "Uncle Thomas: Lawn Jockey For the Far Right." After shopping the idea around and checking our reader email, we can now confirm that the first annual Lawn Jockey Awards will indeed be handed out early this coming summer at a date and location to be announced soon.

Reader J. Dahl Murphy wrote to us about the upcoming awards:

Just finished reading your column about having a lawn jockey awards ceremony in the D. C. area sometime this year. I'm writing to let you know I agree wholeheartedly with the

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idea. The Jesse Petersons, Niger Innises, Star Parkers, Larry Elders and the likes must be called out. Having the awards ceremony expose these folk out for exactly who they are and what they are trying to do. They must not continue at our expense. We have to start putting them on notice.

Would love TV and Radio One to carry this ceremony live...it will be a yearly tradition.

The Lawn Jockey Award, provided we can make the first one happen, is sure to become an annual event. Failed entertainers and rancid talk show figures like those just mentioned will not be considered. Not that they aren't embarrassing caricatures in their own right, but like the fool DC talk show host Don Imus hired to do on-air N-word jokes, such people are actually doing what they were hired to do. Black elected officials, on the other hand, are generally chosen by large black constituencies, and so have little or no excuse to ignore the Black Consensus. Lawn Jockey awards will therefore be limited to public officials, most likely members of Congress.

Luther Allman was one of several readers who wrote about the runners-up for Lawn Jockeys.

In addition to bestowing the supreme award of "Lawn Jockey" at your upcoming dinner, there will be more than enough runner-ups that should be "honored" as well.

Brother Allman went on to offer specific and useful suggested runner-up awards, which we are holding back for publication. The Lawn Jockey is but one member of a whole cast of debased and demeaned black characters called into existence by white supremacy. We may expect that the application of any reasonable yardstick will show other political figures to be guilty of lesser offenses. We invite readers to send more suggestions for runner-up awards and citations, in the spirit of appropriate ridicule and mockery. We promise to print the best of them.

**BC** readers have been known to suggest article topics. We like it even better when they submit well-written article copy themselves, but we do listen.

Carol Hollins wrote:

I would like **BC** to make some comment regarding Mary Matlin's scurrilous description on Hannity and Colmes this week of African Americans as "...people forced to feel like victims..." By the way, I love it when you call out the phony members of the black caucus, especially Imus's boy, Harold Ford. I look forward to the Lawn Jockey Award.

There is only one **BC**, and only once a week. Know-nothing rightist media pundits are so plentiful that deconstructing them would consume all our limited energies. Last month's correction of the Wall Street Journal's opinion page, which branded African Americans as disposable political "outliers" for disagreeing with the bulk of white America will have to do for the moment. African Americans have quite a lot of in-house correcting to do just now, which brings us to one of our least favorite topics – the latest outrage from the execrable congressperson and wannabe U.S. senator from Memphis, Tennessee, Harold Ford Jr.

First, reader Elinor Bowles writes:

Thanks for the scorecard for the CBC. It confirmed some of my thinking and shed a new light on some questionable persons, i.e., Harold Ford. I think this is a real service. I really appreciate the Black Commentator and look forward to getting new issues.

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And now for the outrage: fresh from the Atlanta funeral of Coretta Scott King, at which several speakers voiced opposition to the Bush gang's spies and lies, its imperial wars abroad and efforts to repeal the twentieth century at home, Harold Ford went out of his way to show his hindquarters to black Tennessee and black America. He kissed up to negrophobic campaign contributors and courted the white racist vote, declaring that "...there may have been some comments that were a bit out of line..." and adding that "...I can appreciate some people thinking that it was a bit overboard at times..."

**BC** has to agree with the Pesky Fly, who observed that the craven congressperson sounded "...like a Southern white racist campaigning in Coon Town... He can 'APPRECIATE' people who think it went 'overboard?' This is country club code." And it is. What else can we expect from a black congressperson who let it be known that if Social Security privatization ever came to the floor of the House, his vote would be in play. And what should we expect of such a creature as a U.S. Senator? Ford may yet accomplish the difficult task of making Illinois' Barack "hold-me-back" Obama and the rest of the sorry Senate Democrats look like a bargain. And maybe that's the idea.

Last week's **BC** cover story on the Failures of the Black Misleadership Class prompted a number of responses from our readers.

Thomas wrote us thusly:

You wrote a very insightful and powerful article that provides a very clear look at an issue that is very relevant. The old axiom that power corrupts applies! We must train young leaders.

We respectfully disagree with Thomas. **BC** thinks we have enough "trained" leaders and wannabe leaders. What we lack is a broad social movement, first in black America, then in the wider America to which leaders can be held responsible. Absent such a broad movement, the pervasive corruption which is at the heart of our culture of public officialdom, and the very possibility of getting near to power and acclaim are usually more than enough to take one's breath, or one's principles away, assuming one ever had any. In his recent troubles, entertainer Dave Chappelle pulled an old and unattributed saying out of some pocket or other place to the effect that "talent takes you where character cannot sustain you," and that's the way it is with young leaders.

Furthermore, we can't expect black leadership to be accountable when there is no public space among us for dialogue in which our voices can be heard demanding accountability. We need to put the struggle for community control of media on the top of our list. Otherwise we will never hear each other. Struggles on the other side of the country, or a half mile up the street will continue to be invisible to us, and to potential supporters and adherents. Movements will be stillborn.

Finally, Clinton E. Warner writes:

This commentary is reasonable. It spelled out the fact that the Black middle class obviously accepts the status quo. If you believe that Maynard Jackson was compliant to the white power structure, you are wrong. He brought the airport in on time and under budget, while insisting on equal opportunity for all. The proof is that after leaving office he was virtually ignored by the local power structure. He had to develop his own rather successful business.

It is my belief that relief will come only by politics or insurrection. The latter is out of the question – but a solid Black vote only ONCE in an important election would demonstrate unity that could not be ignored or shoved aside by aspiring office holders.

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**BC** really doesn't believe this is about any "middle class" compliance at all. The black business and leadership class are not a "middle class" in any way that people typically use that term. In capitalist America capital rules, and business is king. The business schools are the best–endowed sections of the universities, and their graduates are a huge chunk of the ruling class. It should be no surprise that, with a lot of help from white America, black America would have aped this configuration.

Our black political leadership has more and more identified with, and often become synonymous with the black business class, which as it has expanded, has identified more with the fashions and fads of the white business class. It was the Freedom Movement, which mobilized large numbers of ordinary non–business–class blacks, that brought Maynard Jackson and his ilk to the table. Atlanta's multibillion dollar airport would have been built with or without Maynard Jackson. And while Jackson and his ilk have done well enough for themselves, they are only a small minority of black America.

And now the white business class is in a crisis. Rates of profits have been declining slowly for a generation. The white business elite has looted the nation's private pensions and privatized huge swaths of government and militarized the economy to guarantee its rate of return. Social security privatization, a large chunk of which was inserted into this year's budget, is a transparent attempt on the part of the white business elite to grab the last big chunk of cash and create another stock market bubble so they can walk away with the savings of millions of workers.

Rather than act like black leaders, this part of our talented tenth has chosen to act like businessmen and women, and ape their white mentors. Instead of going back and helping mobilize the masses that got them their seats at the table in the first place, this class has embraced privatizations and the looting of the public sector which sustained a real black middle class. While the only useful thing they can tell the black masses is to come out and vote, they have helped engineer the demolition and spatial deconcentration of black communities, diluting the effectiveness of that vote.

Why can't more black state and local politicians stand up for a local and statewide living wage, or for universal medical care for all as a way of leveling the playing field between businesses that provide health care and those that don't? Why aren't more of them trying to replicate Maryland's Fair Share Health Care legislation? Why aren't they trying to pass anti–usury laws that would curtail predatory lending and cap credit card interest rates?

Why can they not bring themselves to question the legitimacy of the crime control and prison industries? Why can't any of them run for state legislatures, for sheriff, for district attorney promising a jurisdictional commitment to reducing racial disparities in policing, in prosecution, in sentencing and in prison populations? Why is it that advocacy which benefits the masses never seems to cross their minds?

And why is it that when local elected politicians of this business class smell the chance of breaking out of majority black constituencies and running for statewide or other higher office they routinely feel the need to embrace the very imperial wars that their black constituencies overwhelmingly reject?

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