

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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African Americans and the African world.

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National Public Radio: How Can You Get Rid of "News & Notes"? The African World By Bill Fletcher, Jr. BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor

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I opened the **Washington Post** the other day and saw an article detailing that National Public Radio (NPR), hit by the global economic crisis, was preparing to lay off in March 2009 more than 60 staff and eliminating two major programs, one being "**News & Notes.**"

"News & Notes", a program particularly targeted at people of color, is hosted by Ms. Farai Chideya. In the interests of full disclosure I must mention that I am regularly on the program, generally speaking about Africa. Yet this was not what affected me in reading about this tragedy. It was that "N&N" was a program designed to reach audiences that NPR had previously either ignored or been otherwise unable to connect with. Precisely because NPR is National **Public** Radio it tends to cover issues that are overlooked by or given short shrift by the mainstream media. Nevertheless, NPR often has been criticized for giving insufficient attention to the issues facing younger listeners and listeners of color. It also has demonstrated little awareness of the fact that the perspectives of people of color on issues of the day should be incorporated into the programming of NPR.

The questions that need to be asked are two-fold:

- (1) what are we to make of the end of "N&N", and
- (2) what are the implications of the proposed termination of the program?

NPR states that the termination of this program is the result of the downturn in the economy and the drying up of funds. I do not doubt that this is the case. Virtually every non-profit institution is suffering as a result of the battering that we are taking with the financial crisis on Wall Street as well as overall tightening of everyone's belt.

Yet the story should not stop there, and this relates to the implications. In the world of work, there is a very long experience of "last hired, first fired" when it comes to Black workers. We are very familiar with this. In fact, in so many cases, the only reason that we have been hired in many industries in the first place was/is because of mass pressure, sometimes also involving litigation. This all starts to unravel in bad economic times when, again and again, we lose ground in the precious steps that we have made in the fight for equity.

The proposed end of "N&N" makes me think about "last hired, first fired." A bold and important initiative to reach audiences that are either ignored or taken for granted, "News & Notes" has been a very high quality program. Yet, when times got tight, "N&N" is proposed to be thrown over board.

No, this is not conscious racism. It is, however, a micro-aggression against us. It is saying, once again, that efforts to be inclusive can be considered optional, whereas reaching the traditional, aging and mainly white audience should be considered the core *mission* of the organization. I would suggest that this is or at least should be, unacceptable.

It is time that we speak loudly to NPR and insist that they keep "News & Notes." Yes, NPR has journalists of color and that is great, yet it is not enough, because these journalists do not necessarily pick their stories. These journalists do not necessarily shape the direction of investigations. "News & Notes" exposes the listener not only to stories that range from the liberation struggle in the Western Sahara to the implications of the foreclosure crisis on people of color, but it also engages the voices of experts and activists of color who are all too often marginalized by the mainstream media.

How can we afford to lose this?

So, if you want to do something and are as concerned and angry as I am, then contact NPR's Interim President and CEO Dennis Haarsager at NPR [635 Massachusetts Avenue, NW//Washington, DC 20001]. You can mail them or go to their website at www.npr.com and send in an email. There is no room for silence. I am a bit tired of being marginalized.

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BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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