

No More Empty Promises

As leaders, we must develop a new way of walking out what we've said we'll do for America.

In February I had the chance of a lifetime. As a panel member of a nationally televised forum, I discussed black America's most significant problems with 10 noted civil rights leaders, including Al Sharpton, Cornel West, Harry Belafonte and Louis Farrakhan.

Because this was my second time participating in the forum, I felt confident that meaningful dialogue could occur. I was not disappointed. The State of the Black Union 2006 was a stellar success due to the diligent planning and coordination of host and author Tavis Smiley.

For weeks after the event, everywhere I went people who had watched the program made comments about it and added their "two cents" to the discussion. In fact, it was talked about so much that I asked myself: Why do black Americans even want to talk about social problems and race in America anymore? Shouldn't we be disgusted with unaccountable leaders and their endless rhetoric and moral hypocrisy?

Many black Americans know the United States can fulfill its calling to be the greatest nation in the world just by making minor, but significant, adjustments. So we listen, discuss problems and pray with an expectation that black America can change and move in a better direction.

As a result of the broadcast, I decided to initiate a dialogue with people across the nation—both black and white—who want to see change. I'm convinced there is common ground that we can

reach, where we can address problems such as fatherlessness, unemployment and education.

My solution involved a unique blend of conservative thinking and common sense.

I know the term “black conservative” sounds strange to the average American.

There are certainly quite a few of them in America. In fact, I am one of them! Yet I am convinced that the idea of liberal versus conservative is becoming outdated and meaningless.

These labels describe ideologies and concepts that often are not backed up with clear, consistent action that effect change.

The challenge for the black community is to choose a solid plan that will produce concrete programs, policies and resolutions that change are open to change, but we don't know who to trust in the upcoming election.

It's clear that the Democratic Party has empathized with us without changing the day-to-day plight of the average citizen. On the other hand, Republican values are actually more aligned with what the polls tell us about black people with regard to social issues, economic development and empowerment.

Unfortunately, when a black man on the street speaks out about urgent concerns, he sounds more like rapper Kanye West than former Secretary of State Colin Powell. He fears that “states rights” are synonymous with lynchings and keeping his people down. Yet he loves America.

He feels cheated—thinking that the American dream or at least Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream was a guarantee that all citizens would be treated fairly. But the 2004 presidential debates epitomized that this “guarantee” is still a war of ideas.

We heard articulate speeches about different approaches to solving problems. But two years later, neither Democrats nor Republicans have devised strategies that make a difference.

I suggest we take our cues from the State of the Black Union gathering. As leaders we need to devise a new way of talking and walking out what we promise. Let’s develop an intelligent, biblical worldview to help not only black America move forward, but others too.

Harry R. Jackson Jr. is senior pastor of 3,000-member Hope Christian Church in the nation’s capital. Jackson, who earned an MBA from Harvard, is a best-selling author and popular conference speaker. He leads the High-Impact Leadership Coalition. To read past columns in Charisma by Harry R. Jackson Jr., log on at