

SJR**Charles L. Klotzer**

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Charles L. Klotzer is the editor/publisher emeritus of SJR.

About a year or so ago, I met Sylvester Brown at the award ceremonies sponsored by the Greater St. Louis Association of Black Journalists. During our conversation, I said something like—as far as I remember—how he manages to keep his job while being so outspoken. He didn't exactly answer, but seemed to imply, as long as it lasts, it lasts.

Apparently, my concern was justified.

The editors' reasoning that Brown's alleged infringement of the Post's ethics rules called for his dismissal was so circuitous, far-fetched and self-destructive that one is forced to search for the real cause of this decision.

Whatever merit the accusations may have (for details see page 8), Brown's explanation normally would be accepted as reasonable.

Over the nearly 40 years and the 311 issues that have been published, SJR has never hesitated to be critical of any organization or individual irrespective of their background if we thought such criticism was warranted. I can think of a few occasions when SJR was wrong, but our assumptions seemed justified at the time.

It is not our respect for Brown that caused us to reach a conclusion that drastically differs from the public statement issued by the Post.

Brown contributed to the Post a unique perspective that had been missing from its pages for years. It made the paper multi-dimensional and talked to some ever-present concerns of our African-American neighbors while educating other sectors of our community. If, in our view, the so-called ethics incident was not the root cause of Brown's dismissal, what was?

Four possibilities come to mind: cutting expenses, racial bigotry, trying to discard the Post's liberal reputation, and personality clashes.

Finances

While in Lee Enterprises' dire financial situation every dollar may count, it would have been much easier to let Brown go when Eric Mink, brilliant writer, op-ed editor and occasional columnist, a Caucasian, was discharged along with others. Saving Brown's salary won't help the Lee outfit.

Bigotry

I also don't think outright racial bigotry caused Brown's dismissal. How do I know? An editorial in the St. Louis American cited a number of Post initia-

Why Sylvester Brown was fired

tives that point out the paper's intent to shed once and for all its reputation as a liberal beacon in a conservative state. (The Post's editorial page is one remnant that still hangs on to Pulitzer's vision to fight for "progress and reform." For how long?)

Liberalism

The American reports that the Post circulation department has distributed mailers in West County and South County, with the headline, "Our Coverage is Right on the Money (in more ways than one)." The editorial says that the message lists six bul-

leted points that include "one boasting of publishing 'conservative columnists' and another of providing 'conservative, relevant view points.'"

The mailer, reports the American, "includes reprints of a half-dozen opinion pieces and cartoons that slam the new president."

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So to become more acceptable to the conservative segment of our community, the Post had to get rid of the most-outspoken liberal writer on its staff. If he were a Caucasian and just as outspoken, he would also have been discharged. Eric Mink was.

Personalities

All of this was very likely aggravated by the personalities of the principals involved. As a former editor of Brown's columns said, he was not always receptive to editorial comments. Over years, animosities can build up.

The Post seems to overlook that its circulation still depends on the progressives in our community (except for those that have abandoned it for the New York Times). Gone are the days when the Post cherished and prospered, domestically and internationally, under its liberal reputation. But conservatives cherish their antagonism and they are unlikely to look upon Brown's dismissal as a sign of welcome.

The switch to a more conservative stance probably is not motivated by ideology but by financial concerns of its owners. The assumption is that this conversion will boost its circulation, which, in turn, will attract more advertising.

Once again, it shows up the shortcomings of too many business decisions, the pursuit of profits at any cost. ■