

Copyright 2004 The New York Sun, One SL, LLC
All Rights Reserved The New York Sun
February 10, 2004 Tuesday
SECTION: NEW YORK; Pg. 3
LENGTH: 930 words
HEADLINE: Sharpton Sleaze Factor
BYLINE: JACK NEWFIELD
BODY:

The Reverend Al Sharpton has become a radio-active Trojan Horse. It turns out the left-wing preacher is being subsidized by the sleaziest rightwing consultant, Roger Stone. It's a Marx Brothers parody of the Hitler-Stalin pact.

Mr. Stone is the guy who led the mob to invade the counting room in Miami in 2000 and stop the Florida recount. He is also the guy who had to quit Bob Dole's "family values" campaign when semi-nude photos of him and his wife ran in a swinger's magazine promoting promiscuous sexual encounters.

Rev. Sharpton is a smart survivor who has become a force in local politics, even after being exposed as an FBI informer, a rape hoaxer, and the demagogue who called a Jewish merchant in Harlem "a white interloper" just before his shop was torched.

But now, there just might be a critical mass of sleaze that finally punctures the man who has squandered so much talent on scams of vanity. He returns for the New York primary diminished and redemonized.

In last week's Village Voice, Wayne Barrett exposed Rev. Sharpton's presidential campaign as a Republican holding company, with the freaky dirty tricks expert Roger Stone as the cash conduit.

Mr. Stone has loaned more than \$200,000 to Rev. Sharpton's shell organization, the National Action Network. NAN has also run up \$18,000 on Mr. Stone's credit card. Mr. Sharpton's campaign also owes Mr. Stone \$50,000. And his campaign manager is a Stone operative, who stays in Mr. Stone's apartment and is not getting paid, according to Mr. Sharpton's filings.

All this should disqualify Rev. Sharpton from getting the federal matching funds he covets. And it should limit his capacity to make mischief in future elections. Mr. Stone says he wants Rev. Sharpton to run as an "independent" in 2008 to beat Hillary Clinton.

There is a long pattern of Rev. Sharpton helping Republicans on Election Day. In 1986, he endorsed Alfonse D'Amato over Mark Green, in return for a HUD grant. In 1992, he relentlessly bashed Mr. D'Amato's challenger, Robert Abrams. In 1994, he appeared in public with George Pataki two days before he beat Mario Cuomo. In 2000, Rev. Sharpton invited spoiler Ralph Nader to join him on election eve. Rev. Sharpton has always loved the conspiratorial game of playing both ends against the middle, just like Mr. Stone's mentor, the odious Roy Cohn.

There is also a long pattern of Rev. Sharpton's financial chicanery of unpaid debts, lawsuits, borrowing, and credit card scams. His campaign is reportedly \$500,000 in debt.

His former South Carolina campaign manager says he quit when Rev. Sharpton asked him to rent - and pay for - a storefront headquarters. The campaign manager was already owed many weeks' salary.

Rev. Sharpton has not disputed any of Mr. Barrett's facts; he's only attacked Mr. Barrett on a personal level - just as he has been lashing out at fellow blacks lately, including Rep. Charles Rangel, Virginia Fields, Ron Daniels, and Bill Lynch. He is blaming everyone but himself for his bad showing in South Carolina. Rev. Sharpton has always been brazenly unflappable in embarrassment, but now he seems to be falling apart.

This Sharpton-GOP alliance has been rumored for years. In my 1995 biography of Don King, I described how Rev. Sharpton had a desk in the office of racist Republican Senator Strom Thurmond and arranged for James Brown to make a commercial supporting Thurmond for re-election. I also reported that Rev. Sharpton had asked Thurmond to use his influence to block a Justice Department investigation into King.

Rev. Sharpton never runs for an office he might actually win, like the City Council. The real purpose of his presidential campaign is to get his hands on federal matching funds and to push aside his mentor, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, as the leading national spokesman for black America. When he started running, he told me he would win South Carolina's primary the way Rev. Jackson did in 1984. He promised he would win New York City the way Rev. Jackson did in 1988.

In his mind, Rev. Sharpton is running against Rev. Jackson, not President Bush. He owes Rev. Jackson a concession speech.

It seems unlikely he will come close to Rev. Jackson's 1988 accomplishment, which electrified the black community and set in motion the events of David Dinkins's election in 1989.

Rev. Sharpton campaigns here after getting less than 20% of the black vote in South Carolina and with most black leaders here supporting other candidates, including Mr. Rangel, Mr. Dinkins, Ms. Fields, Bill Perkins, and Greg Meeks.

Rev. Sharpton often says he comes out of "The House of King," in an effort to identify himself with Martin Luther King and the glory of the civil rights movement. But, more accurately, Rev. Sharpton comes out of the house of Don King, his mentor in hustling grandiosity.

I had the privilege of knowing Dr. King. He had absolute moral authority; Al Sharpton has none.

Dr. King had God's love for humankind. There is no love in Al Sharpton. Dr. King spoke "truth to power," but the truth is not in Rev. Al. Dr. King also had an amazing capacity for growth, from integrating Montgomery's buses in 1955, to opposing the Vietnam War in 1967, to leading the multiracial poor people's campaign at the hour of his assassination at age 39. Dr. King had an ever-deepening social analysis that came to include class, economics, and labor.

Rev. Sharpton is 49, and he has stopped growing. He has no third act. In the years between Dr. King and Rev. Sharpton, we have sunk from church to burlesque, from conscience to con, from the Nobel Peace Prize to Roger Stone's credit card.