



## The Head Negro in Charge Syndrome: The Dead End of Black Politics (Nation Books)

By Norman Kelley



**The Head Negro in Charge Syndrome: The Dead End of Black Politics (Nation Books)** By Norman Kelley

Al Sharpton's entrance into the 2004 Democratic presidential race is evidence of a decaying black political culture where ego trumps politics. It is the last gasp of a tradition that has been transformed over a generation from bold, effective and results-oriented politics to rhetoric and symbolism, argues crime writer and social commentator Norman Kelley. As Kelley shows, what Sharpton covets is the sobriquet—The Head Negro in Charge (HNIC), a symbolic political mobilization that replaces effective politics and organizing. "The HNIC syndrome has seen the rise of symbolic leaders—Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan, Sharpton and now Russell Simmons—who may be charismatic," Kelley writes, "but are politically unaccountable to the very people they claim to represent, namely African Americans. The transformation has been underway since the 1970s, but most African Americans have yet to confront it." HNIC syndrome is both a symptom and response to the failings of black political and cultural orthodoxy, of a sclerotic black elite represented by the NAACP and the Black Congressional Caucus, who have embedded themselves into the machinery of the Democratic Party and the conservative movement.

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