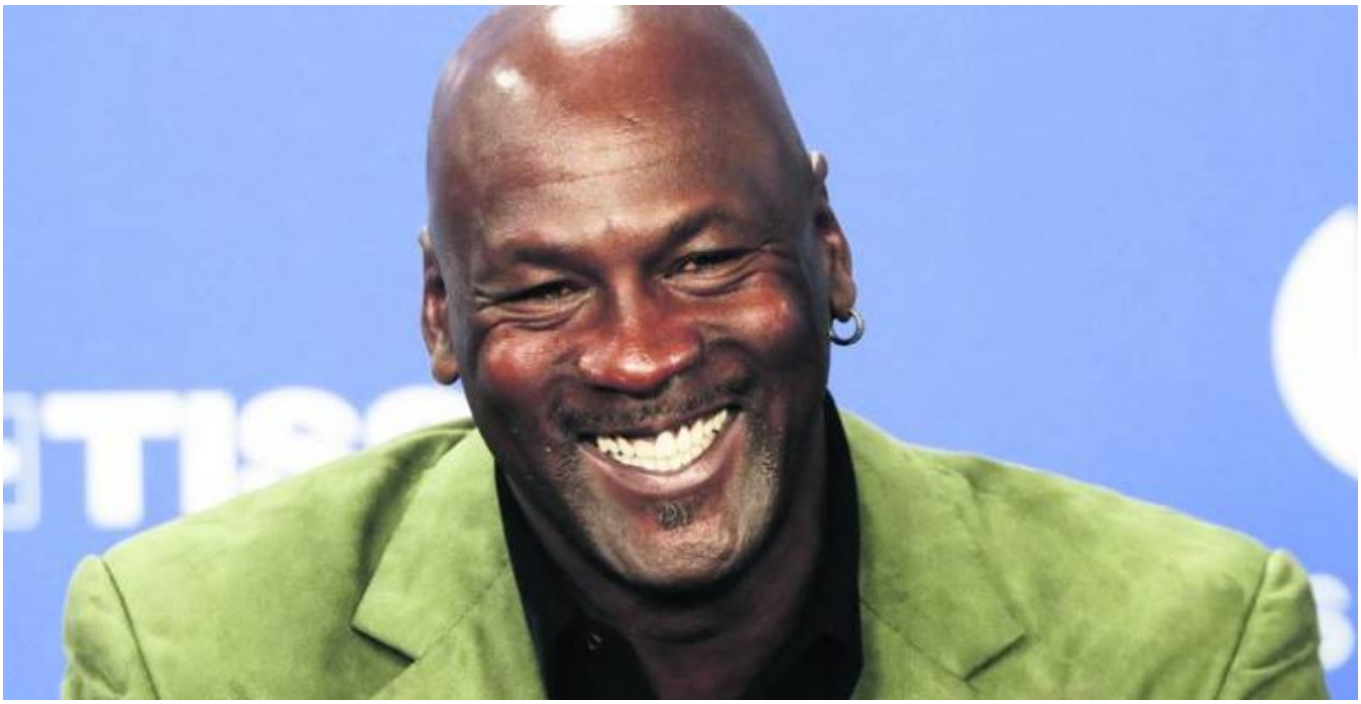
Michael Jordan on racism, education and $100 million for social justice

By: Rick Bonnel
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Michael Jordan knows money alone can’t solve racism, or barriers to upward mobility for the poor.

But he hopes the pledge he and Jordan Brand made Friday — to donate $100 million over the next 10 years — helps start a conversation and a level of education that can finally end the ingrained racism the Charlotte Hornets owner says he’s seen all his life as an African American.

“We have encountered racism to be somewhat acceptable in certain circles,” Jordan told The Observer. “We’ve got to understand at an early age (that can’t be tolerated). Education is such an important part” of societal change.

The pledge, by Jordan and the Nike division named for him, will go to support organizations working for racial equality, social justice and greater access to education.

Jordan said that element — access to education — is crucial to both

upward mobility and changing cultural norms regarding race and poverty. He called the killing of African American George Floyd in Minneapolis by a white policeman the “tipping point” for decades of black outrage over brutality toward people of color.

Michael Jordan: “We have been beaten down (as African Americans) for so many years. It sucks your soul. You can’t accept it anymore. This is a tipping point. We need to make a stand. We’ve got to be better as a society regarding race.”

RB: What has to happen to change racist behaviors?

MJ: “Face up to your demons. Extend a hand. Understand the inequalities. Sure, it’s about bargaining for better policing, but it’s more. We have encountered racism to be somewhat acceptable in certain circles.”

RB: Which organizations get the $100 million? Where does that money go to address these issues?

MJ: “We haven’t yet figured which vehicles to utilize. But it’s first about making an effort. It’s not just (donating) money. It’s the act of calling on all of us to take a look at ourselves. That’s an important start.”

RB: How would you describe bias?

MJ: “Just because someone grew up in a slum doesn’t mean you should look at them as not being equal — so they, themselves, start seeing themselves as not equal. You should not feel you’re better than others because you grew up with more advantages.”

RB: Describe your emphasis on education ...

MJ: “It’s education 110%. My parents always stressed that education as how you best bond with other people. Education is the best route for black people to better themselves. To compete to be the best you can be, you have got to be educated. If you look at this country, that helping hand (to get a college education) is the best chance to stand up on your own.”

RB: What’s your approach to philanthropy?

MJ: “If I’m giving $100 million, along with Jordan Brand, then we’re going to make this go in a way that makes a difference. And this

—attacking ingrained racism, supporting educational opportunity — is a very necessary step in society.”

RB: You’ve contributed millions to hurricane relief and to build two Novant Health clinics in under-served neighborhoods. What do you hope to accomplish?

MJ: “This isn’t just about donations, writing checks. But those hospital (clinics) make a difference. I’m challenging people to effect change however they can.”