

POINT OF VIEW

Guest Editorial

The color line

By Wendell P. Williams  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The great W.E.B. DuBois predicted in his classic "The Souls of Black Folks" that the problem of the 20th century is the color line. He was ever so right.

Almost 100 years after DuBois made his prediction, the "color line" is still a sad, insidious central fact of American life. The color line has never been more distinct and clearly drawn in the shaping of election '98, in Nevada. In fact, the tone that many political fronts are taking, seems to be pulling back to the era of Jim Crow.

It also appears that both Democrats and Republicans made the "color line" an issue but neither chooses to deal with it, rather, they ignore it.

First, let's take an early look at the Democrats so-called "Party of the People."

The Dems are claiming to have a coordinated campaign designed to make Democrats come to the polls November. However, I haven't been able to find one African-American elected official that has been asked to be a part of this so-called coordinated campaign. In fact, the first event staged by this group on a college campus attracted less students than it would take to form a baseball team. What an insult to Congressman John Lewis, the guest speaker, known for organizing students for the common good.

Democrats should also be aware that people all over the country are watching very closely on how they deal with the campaign of State Senator Joe Neal and his quest for governor.

The "color line" now has Democrats, who for decades depended on the African-American vote for their successes, running away from the highest ranking African-American official, one who has always been there for them.

The formula is simple, if they now choose to forget Neal, then we should forget them. And, speaking of Senator Neal, I can't even imagine what the labor unions are thinking about in considering not supporting his campaign. No one who has carried the banner for working people in Nevada higher than Neal in the past 25 years.

Remember, it was back in 1960 that A. Philip Randolph formed the Negro-American Labor Council to counter what he saw as lip service to union inclusions by the AFL-CIO. The "color line" is even slowing down the labor movement, what a shame.

On another political color front, Jerry Keller has quietly appointed an African-American advisory group to Las Vegas police. Is this group advising him from his office's stand point or a re-election stand point? How does this group get input from the residents of the African-American communities?

We would also like to know how this group feels about Keller's support of his officer Holley, the president of the police union who referred to African-Americans as "coons?"

In fact, it has now been over four months since Nevada made national news for Mr. Holley's referring to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a "coon" and we have received no response from the letters to Sen. Harry Reid, Shelly Berkley or other top Democrats about their position on Holley's insult.

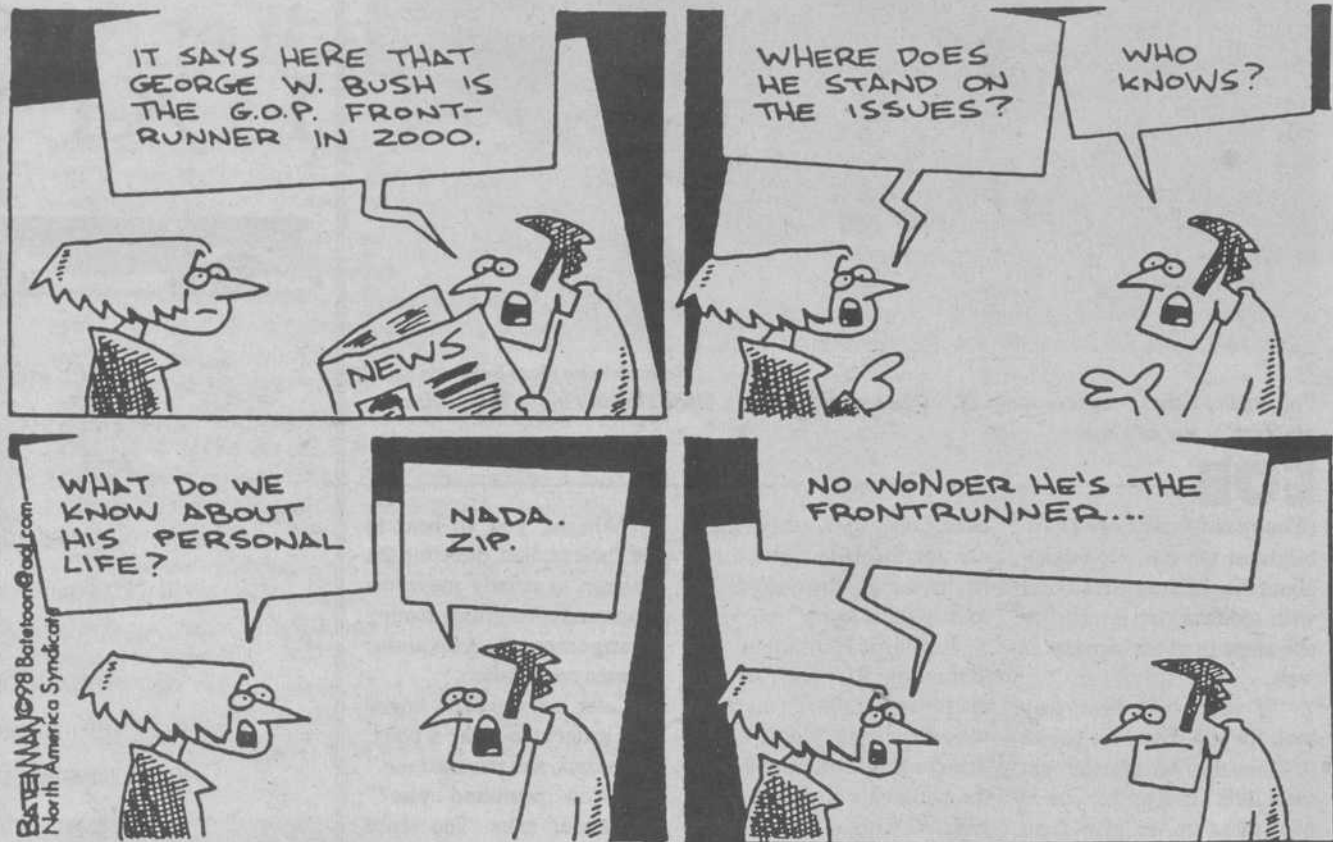
Now if you think the Democrats are cause for worry, wait till we talk about the GOP.

It seems that the Republicans are back to dealing with the "color line" in the only way they know how: finding sell-outs and handkerchief heads to do their dirty work for BBQ dinners and watermelon.

Whether Clark County Commission Chairwoman Yvonne Atkinson Gates is right or wrong in her ethics situations, we must first allow the process to take place before we are used to do someone else's dirty work. No one should want to be in office so bad that they would allow the Republicans to make you a slave in 1998. Those who choose to dance on the "color line" should be reminded that African-American voters are a lot smarter than you think. You may think that you can dance in at the last minute with your tricks and games and secure votes. But, think twice and remember Jim Bilbray in 1994.

Almost 150 years after DuBois made his prediction, the "color line" is still preventing Nevada from progressing. The bottom line is simple, regardless of whether African-American voters live in Green Valley, West Las Vegas, Summerlin or Reno, they all want the same things from government as anyone else: quality schools for their children, safe neighborhoods, clean environments, fair and decent wages and fair opportunities in business and careers.

What we don't need are attempts by politicians to pit us against one another, using sell-outs to do their dirty work.



An open letter to my black sisters and brothers

Special to Sentinel-Voice

To My Black Sisters and Brothers,

We stand on the shoulders of a people strong in their moral convictions, a people whose history is one filled with unmerited suffering. We stand on the shoulders of a people who battled evil and racism and greed. We stand on the shoulders of a people who taught us that the stereotypes and lies about our people were untrue and who stood up on the side of right, even when it meant physical danger to them and their families. We come from a people of whom we can be proud.

Yes, our history is one full of pain and suffering. But, somehow, have we closed our eyes to the pain and suffering of others? Are we only able to recognize what has happened to our own people and not see and feel the racism felt by others? Can we not make the connections between what has happened and is happening to us and to our native American and Hispanic and Asian American brothers and sisters?

I am painfully aware of this narrow vision, having recently sat through the jury selection on a case concerning a group of native Americans arrested in a protest against Chief Wahoo, the racist logo of the Cleveland Indians. As I listened to dozens of prospective jurors, mostly African-American, I heard over and over again that they did not think about the racist stereotype of Chief Wahoo or that they did not think this was an important issue because it did not impact them. Only a handful could relate that racist image to Aunt Jemima or Little

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



Black Sambo and realize how damaging images really can be to us all.

Living in Cleveland, I often see African-American brothers and sisters wearing Chief Wahoo caps or jackets. Occasionally, I ask them why they wear them. Mostly, they cite support for the baseball team and none of them had ever really looked at that buck-toothed, grinning image or stopped to think about what it was saying about a whole group of people. Having grown up in Washington, D.C., I know that most African-American Redskins fans still never think about the racist name of that football team or how they would feel if that team was named the Washington Blackskins.

Would we allow the Washington football team or the Cleveland baseball team to even play if those were our images and names they were using? Would we stand by silently, pretending that the names and the images are unimportant? Would we allow our children to have their image of themselves formed by Little Black Sambo or the name Blackskins?

The answer, I believe, to all these questions is no. And if we would not allow racism in names and logos to exist if they were focused on our

people, then how can we allow, how can we abet such racism which it is focused on others? We cannot wear moral blinders, only reacting when racism directly affects our own people. To do so undermines our moral authority and it just isn't right.

Some have argued that if it is that important to Native Americans, why haven't they done something about it. But the reality is that many Native Americans have been working on this issue, many have been protesting and some, like those in that trial I attended, have been arrested. But their arrests, their protests, their work receives no press. And if we in the African-American community had waited until we had complete agreement

among our own people, we would still be sitting in the back of the bus and still be denied the right to vote.

What if every African-American in this nation decided to stop wearing Chief Wahoo or Redskin or Braves or Chiefs clothing? What if African-American mayors and City Councilpersons in this nation took the moral high ground and came out against racist logos and team names? What if African-American baseball and football players said they were against such racism? What if African-American ministers spoke out against demeaning a whole group of people through sports team logos and names? What if....

Chief Wahoo and the name Redskins are no more an honor to native Americans than Aunt Jemima or Little Black Sambo were to us. They are all racist caricatures which de-humanize and take away the dignity of a group of people.

Let's stand with our Native American brothers and sisters. Let's take off the blinders and look beyond ourselves. Let's stand on the high moral ground. Let us begin right now.

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