

C O M M E N T A R Y

Republicans trying to kill Blacks with kindness

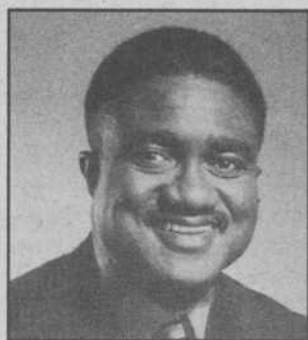
By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Republican Party, after receiving only 8 percent of the African-American vote in the 2000 presidential election, has established a goal of winning 25 percent of the Black vote in next year's contest. Instead of making that announcement when most people were preparing to make their New Year's resolutions, the GOP should have delayed that announcement for three months. Then, it would be clear that this was some sort of April Fool's joke.

What has George Bush done to quadruple his Black support? Let's ignore the rhetoric and look at the record.

First, Bush pledged during his 2000 campaign that he would govern as a compassionate conservative. As has been observed, he has been compassionate toward conservatives. For example, most of his tax cuts benefited the wealthy, the majority of whom vote Republican. Meanwhile, Bush did not seek to fully fund his No Child Left Behind education law, he has proposed changes in programs such as Head Start that will be detrimental to Black children, and the president has no significant domestic policy that will uplift African-Americans.

Bush had a chance to show some compassion by supporting affirmative action in a pair of University of Michigan cases that came before the Supreme Court in 2003. Instead, Bush ordered his solicitor general to oppose the cases and had the insensitivity to announce his decision on Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. That's a strange way of showing compassion.



GEORGE CURRY

A conservative Supreme Court — with seven of its nine members appointed by Republican presidents — upheld the concept of affirmative action in the case involving the University of Michigan's Law School. And true to form, Bush praised the virtues of diversity after the ruling while neglecting to point out that his position would have made that goal more difficult to achieve.

In a move that will make courts of the future more likely to reflect his politics, Bush has packed the federal courts with Right-wing judges. One of them, Janice Rogers Brown, is so far out of the mainstream that she is a frequent dissenter on the Republican-controlled California Supreme Court. Bush wants to elevate her to a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. The Black conservative is so extreme that the White chief judge in California, also a Republican, says she minimizes the harm of racial discrimination in order to make political points.

Bush has displayed his disdain for Black America by meeting only once with members of the Congressional Black Caucus, despite repeated requests for meetings. Like them or not, Black members of Congress were fairly elected by voters — and that's more than we can say about Bush. When Bush thumbs his nose at them, he thumbs his nose at all African-Americans.

By disrespecting authentic Black leaders, Bush seems to be subscribing to the thinking of Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker. In 1983, Gingrich said, "It is in the interest of the Republican Party

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Hussein testing Howard Dean's anti-war position

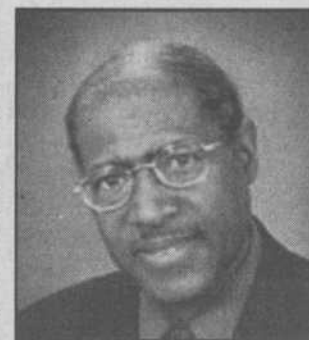
By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The capture of Saddam Hussein — and what that has or has not meant for America's security — has highlighted Democratic front-runner Howard Dean's role as the most outspoken major candidate against the war. He solidified that position by launching a major foreign policy speech on the day after Saddam was found in a hole near his hometown in northern Iraq.

Dean was immediately attacked by candidates John Kerry and Joseph Lieberman, each of whom tried to paint Dean's anti-war position as reflecting a lack of experience. Lieberman was particularly shrill, saying that Dean's position would have left Saddam Hussein in power. So what? It's not like there are not dictators in other countries. Neither Bush nor Lieberman has proved that there was it was an urgent need to remove Hussein from power, despite the fact that he was a despot.

Let's be candid. Saddam Hussein's actions in his own country were not the real reason that Bush invaded Iraq. Many critics have concluded that the control of Iraqi oil was the primary objective of the invasion. That suspicion has been heightened by the Bush administration's decision award post-war contracts in Iraq only to U.S. companies.

So, the fact that Saddam was a despot — as bad as that was — is beside the point. The crucial issue wasn't that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, if that was really the case. And Bush has yet to convincingly link Hussein to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.



RON WALTERS

But Lieberman and Kerry don't get it. Their position is roughly the same as Bush's. And that's been the main problem with the Democratic Party lately on so many issues. With so little difference between Democrats and Republicans on some issues, it's not surprising that some voters are reluctant to embrace the Party out of

power.

Lieberman chastises Dean for moving away from the Clinton policy of being pro-corporate and pro-military defense establishment. But how can the Democratic Party hold these positions and at the same time support labor and social programs that help the poor and disadvantaged? As much as they hate it, Democrats must make a choice.

During most of the campaign, Democrats have presented a unified front by attacking George W. Bush. Party officials, eager to win next November, had urged candidates not to destroy each other during the process of picking a nominee. But the capture Saddam Hussein has changed all of that.

In an odd way, an international issue is forcing candidates to reveal what direction they favor on the domestic front.

At this point, the invasion of Iraq is still popular with 60 percent of the American people in general. But slightly more than half of the Black community disapproves, according to a recent Time magazine poll. Bush can campaign on the war and is even getting a bump for the capture of Saddam Hussein.

It is clear to me that the Bush and Karl (See Waters, Page 10)

Thurmond saga reveals truths about hypocrisy, privilege

By Annette Gordon-Reed
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In responding to the story of White supremacist Strom Thurmond having a Black daughter, most commentators have keyed in on the hypocrisy of racism.

It's certainly fascinating to think about a staunch segregationist campaigning against the rights of Blacks and ranting about the dangers of the "mongrelization" of the White race while he was giving money to his secret Black daughter and paying her college tuition.

But in addition to the heavy load of racial hypocrisy that the story unearths, it also has another important element.

That is the sexual advantage that is often taken by one with more wealth and social standing than another.

Essie Mae Washington-Williams's mother, Carrie Butler, was a 16-year-old maid for the Thurmond household when she became pregnant by 22-year-old Strom. Although the age of consent in South Carolina at the time was 14, the circumstances make you wonder if this could have been a consensual relationship.

Think of the Thurmond household in 1925. Here was Carrie Butler — a poor, Black, female — 16 years old. In contrast, Strom was older and the scion of a prominent family. His power was in inverse proportion to her vulnerability. With such a power deficit, could she have said "no" to him?

We all have our instinctive responses to that question, based upon our knowledge of power, race and gen-

der relations.

I am inclined to agree with those who give an immediate and emphatic "no," for reasons that I'll explain shortly. Yet, I pause over that response because I don't want to imply that every Black woman who worked in the homes of White people in the South had to have sex and babies with the White men in the household whenever they asked them to. That is not true. There were Black women who resisted the advances of White men, kept their jobs and struggled on. They must not be forgotten as we try to do justice to Carrie Butler.

Butler's age at the time is the major cause for suspecting it was not truly consensual.

Even if Thurmond didn't knock her down and drag her

into the bedroom, teen-age girls are notoriously susceptible to abusive manipulation by older men. Even today, men who are six years or more older than their teen-aged partners cause a disproportionate number of teen pregnancies.

The age differential definitely affects the outcome in these sexual encounters. This may be because the teens aren't able to stand up to older men who demand sex without protection, or because they fall for promises of support from men who are out in the workplace.

Either way, they are in over their heads. Carrie Butler was left to make decisions that no one her age should ever have to make.

She struggled alone for six months before she left town to give her daughter to rela-

tives who could provide a better life than she could. Young Strom, a teacher at the local high school, was apparently exiled to Florida for a time to sell real estate. He returned to study law with his father. Soon he began his meteoric rise in South Carolina politics, fueled in great part by catering to his constituents' hostility toward people such as Carrie Butler and the daughter he had with her.

Who knows what Carrie Butler really thought about Strom Thurmond? The absence of her voice is poignant.

Essie Mae Washington-Williams says her mother described Thurmond as "a nice man" and took her to meet him many years after what transpired in 1925.

That intrigues me, and makes me think that at least

the grownup Carrie Butler had a lot of backbone.

Imagine being a Southern Black woman in the early 1960s and walking your half-White daughter, the very image of her White father, into his law office to introduce the two.

By then Butler was gravely ill and may well have wanted to leave her daughter with something positive, some connection that might make her path in life smoother than her own had been. Mothers often do that.

But we owe it to Carrie Butler not to gloss over the harsh world she lived in and brought her daughter into. There's nothing left to do but try to tell the truth of that time.

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