

C O M M E N T A R Y

Blacks, Whites remain divided on key issues

By Lloyd Williams

Special to the Sentinel-Voice

With the Presidential primary season set to start, I am struck by the fact that the only African-American candidates, Al Sharpton and Carol Moseley Braun, have basically been dismissed by the mainstream media as also-rans, even though the first vote is yet to be cast.

Typically, TV pundits don't bother to discuss their platforms or mention what percentage of voters planning to cast a ballot for either of them. The same can be said of Dennis Kucinich, who has been similarly overlooked, even though his progressive ideas resonate with me far more than anything I've heard from Clark, Kerry, Lieberman, Gephardt or Edwards.

And while Howard Dean seems to take many stands that sound sensible, I am dismayed by the widespread concern that he might be unelectable because he is too liberal. In a democracy, majority rules, and what I find so upsetting is the fact that the majority of the populace is apparently very committed to a set of self-interests which remain squarely at odds with much of what would be of benefit to people who look like me.

Blacks and Whites, in general, come down on the opposite side of many, many issues, not just O.J., Kobe and Michael Jackson as the opinion pollsters would have us believe. I suspect that Blacks and Whites are just as evenly divided on such hot-button topics as the war in Iraq, racial profile stops, universal healthcare and affordable housing. Whites probably oppose the government guaranteeing medical cov-

erage and decent shelter because they already enjoy these basics. But life is very different for the masses of African-Americans who have been stuck in ghettos for generations, following the ugly legacy of slavery.

- This is why Blacks would prefer to spend billions on domestic concerns over anything having to do with the Middle East. While in White circles, it continues to be considered unpatriotic to question the conquest of Iraq. Black people began wondering what the obviously impatient President was up to from the moment he seemed hell bent on invading Iraq over the protests of most of our allies, the United Nations and weapons inspectors.

A generation ago, I remember how Muhammad Ali was widely hated by whites for refusing to fight in Vietnam, even though he so matter-of-factly explained, "I got nothing against no Vietcong. No Vietnamese ain't never called me nigger." And although, he was easily the most admired Black figure of his day, Ali was subsequently stripped of his title, jailed and humiliated for simply speaking his mind, saying something that most other African-Americans instinctively agreed with.

Today, Islam is the fastest growing religion in America, this despite the fact that the President has all but declared the belief system synonymous with evil. Most of the converts are not White. Does anybody wonder what would attract so many Black males and convicts to a religion that is demonized as godless and violent by the media? Perhaps it has to do with the prospects of a

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Bush doggedly altering statutes on POW status

By Bill Fletcher Jr.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Any regular reader of my columns knows that, despite my opposition to the invasion of Iraq, I have never been fond of Saddam Hussein. The descriptions of his diabolical approach to ruling Iraq are without dispute.

I am, however, very perplexed by the stand taken by the Bush administration on Hussein's status as a prisoner. The administration has announced that Hussein will not be granted prisoner of war status. The justification seems to be that Hussein is so evil that he does not deserve it.

I hate to break it to the administration, but there are no indices of evil when it comes to prisoner of war status. If there is a war and someone fighting for one side or the other is captured, that individual is a prisoner of war. It does not matter whether that person is a foot soldier or the president of the Republic of Iraq. It does not matter whether that person took power in a coup or was an elected leader. Saddam Hussein was the internationally-recognized president of Iraq. His country was illegally invaded, thus precipitating a war. He was ultimately captured. Therefore, according to the Geneva Convention, he is a prisoner of war.

The Administration, however, seems to view things a bit differently. For them, basic rules do not seem to apply. It is okay, for instance, for the U.S.A. to break international law and invade a country if the administration believes it to be okay. It is okay for the Bush administration to concoct a category that the no one in the world

recognizes called "enemy combatant" as a way of keeping prisoners captive without recourse to either prisoner of war status or the status of civilian prisoners (the situation facing all those in Guantanamo Bay). Thus, the status issue with Saddam Hussein is simply the logical course of the opportunistic use of language by an administration that will not let either facts, or laws get in the way of its objectives.

There is a tremendous danger when one allows a government to play fast and loose with international law and precedent. There is no way to stop it, nor any way of knowing the limits to which that it will go. Yes, it is absolutely the case that there are few people on this planet that will shed a tear for Saddam Hussein, but if the administration can unilaterally decide that the rules of war do not apply to Hussein, to whom do the rules of war apply? Is there a particular enemy or set of enemies that the Bush administration will decide should receive the treatment afforded by the Geneva Convention? Or, does it depend on which side of the bed the president arises from each morning and who he decides happens to be evil?

From the standpoint of everyday citizens of the U.S.A., there is another important concern. If the U.S.A. does not recognize international law except when it benefits the current administration, why should any other country? In fact, is this the real reason that the Bush administration did not want to sign onto the International Criminal Court, and was demanding that other countries exempt the U.S.A.? Could it concoct a category that the no one in the world

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Don't live in past—Review it, learn from it, move on

By James Clingman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

We spend a lot of time reminiscing about the past. We devote some of our time remembering and revering those who have gone before us, and we commemorate the accomplishments of past generations. In addition, we commiserate about the treatment and mistreatment of Black people in this country ever since we were brought here.

Personally, I often ponder and write about the past 39 years of Black American history. Now that 2003 has passed, and in some cases, passed us by, what do we have to look forward to in 2004? Will we relax in the easy chair of the past, or will we get up and start running down the road of new possibilities?

The first thing we do each year is celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In my hometown, they will get together, hold hands and

march, sing and pray, render sermon-like speeches, make political pontifications, and quote "I have a dream" so many times it will almost trivialize the point King was making on August 28, 1963. They will tell us what Dr. King wanted and what he meant and what he would be doing if he were alive today. They will co-opt his "dream" and use it as a balm to soothe Black folks who are fighting for justice—fighting for the very things King was fighting for when he shared his "dream" with us.

What they will not do in my hometown, where the King Day March has been going on for many years now, is deal with anything that has to do with economic empowerment, like starting an investment fund by collecting a few dollars from the thousands who attend the memorial celebration. (MLK Black Business Investment Fund. Now there's a thought. It sure

beats naming streets after him). They will not discuss what Dr. King said during the end of his final speech in Memphis in 1968. They will genuflect at Dr. King's ideals but will not implement his instructions. When it comes to Dr. King, it's much easier to relive and celebrate the past than it is to do the work of realizing the "dream."

After King Day, we will move into Black History Month. McDonald's will roll out their Black Inventors Campaign, once again for the umpteenth time, and tell us how smart our people were, that is, if you buy a Big Mac. Other corporations will mesmerize us with Black History Month sales and promotions. We will esteem the pyramid builders and celebrate our great heritage, all while we continue our conspicuous consumption, as described by economist, Thorstein Veblen, and our "verbal recalcitrance" when it comes to obtaining

true economic freedom.

As this year goes by, and we get caught up in our celebrations and holidays, some of us will face another New Year's Eve and make resolutions for 2005, having been lulled to sleep once again by the "dreams" of Unity, Self-Determination, and other Kwanzaa Principles we celebrate rather than practice each year. The powers-that-be will exhale, having realized the benefit of another year of high retail sales and billions in revenues from our \$700 billion in "Black Buying Power." Let the party begin—again!

The past is a great teacher but a poor landlord. As long as we keep reliving the past, we will never get to preparing for our future. And we can only prepare for our future by using the present to do all we can while we are alive. Unfortunately, we fall prey, sometimes willingly, to the hoopla of celebratory ges-

tures and empty rhetoric from politicians and business owners who really have no interest in our future. They are quite willing to hold hands when it comes to our past but you can't find them with search warrant when it comes to supporting the economic future of Black folks. But that's all right; we can do that for ourselves.

Amos Wilson told us to get busy building some pyramids of our own, in addition to celebrating the ones our ancestors built. Since it would defy all logic for greedy, corrupt, and evil men to teach and promote the economic advancement of those outside their group, Black people had better get out of the past and get on with our future—for ourselves and among ourselves. Other sub-groups are doing just that, and we had better get with the program.

Here's an interesting thought to support my contention. Each year we get a

mega-dose of Black history from corporate marketers and politicians, telling us how great we "were." Why then do many of those same folks tell us to forget about the past when it comes to things like reparations, slavery, and lynching? They say, "That was in the distant past;" "Let's move on;" "All of the slaves and slave masters are dead." In one breath, they tell us to remember our history, but in the next breath they tell us to forget about it. We must remember our past; we must teach it to our children and not allow others to do that in our stead. We must not, however, live in the past. It is there for our learning; it is there for the benefit of our collective future. Reflect on 2003, and then get busy "doing" in 2004.

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