

COMMENTARY

As president, Reagan made racism tolerable

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In a 1980 presidential debate against Jimmy Carter, the late Ronald Reagan will forever be remembered for having asked, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" If African-Americans were to ask themselves if they are better off today than

they were before eight years of Ronald Reagan in the White House, the answer would be an emphatic no.

Ronald Reagan was an amiable figurehead who made racism respectable. Efforts to re-write history, even by newspapers with so-called liberal editorial pages, cannot change that fact. I didn't say he was a racist — I said he made racism respectable. And he did so by launching an all-out attack on civil rights, all while smiling, tilting his head to the side, and doing a better acting job in the White House than he ever did in Hollywood.

Reagan made his White House mission clear by kicking off his 1980 general election campaign in Philadelphia, Miss., where three civil rights workers had been murdered in 1964.

Reagan appointed William Bradford Reynolds as assistant attorney general for civil rights. Not only did Reynolds make it clear that the administration would no



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longer use goals and timetables to help eradicate racial discrimination, he went so far as to seek the invalidation of voluntary affirmative action programs around the country.

Reynolds wasn't Reagan's only bad appointment. He selected William H. Rehnquist, then the most conservative member of the

Supreme Court, to become chief justice. Reagan appointed Antonin Scalia, who was even more conservative than Rehnquist, to a seat on the court. He also picked Sandra Day O'Connor, a conservative who slightly moderated some of her views after being elevated to the High Court, and Anthony Kennedy, who remained a true conservative.

At the executive level, Clarence Pendleton, a divisive Black conservative, was appointed chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. His selection ended what had been a history of bi-partisan cooperation on the commission, which had been created under Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican. Initially, Reagan had sought to disband the commission, but Congress overruled him.

Clarence Thomas, was first appointed to a post in the Department of Education before being named to head the Equal
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Missing from Iraq story: The Black perspective

By Lloyd Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The five most dangerous African-Americans around today, are the Uncle Tom sell-outs whose every breath is committed to advancing the interests of the Bush Administration. Because of the limited access legitimate Black leaders have to the media, these race traitors mislead the world about our perspective on Iraq and on world affairs.

Recent admissions by disgruntled White House insiders have exposed National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice as inept and, quite curiously, having all but rolled out the red carpet for Al-Qaeda by cutting the anti-terrorism budget. And Secretary of State Colin Powell repeatedly lied for his boss about weapons of mass destruction to the U.N. and to anybody else who would listen. His son, FFC Chairman Michael Powell, meanwhile, was busy eliminating the last vestiges of Black TV and radio access by rubber-stamping a measure turning all the airwaves in minority hands over to rich, conservative, mega-networks.

Remember Brigadier General Vince Brooks? We now know that he was likely lying through his teeth during those CENTCOM's daily briefings in which he claimed that Iraqi prisoners were being treated humanely and in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Most embarrassing of all is Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas because he cast the deciding vote

to nullify the 2000 Presidential election and just give the Bush junta free rein to destabilize the planet politically.

What's tragic is that Thomas, symbolically at least, was a replacement for Thurgood Marshall, a tireless crusader who had selflessly dedicated his life to dismantling the Jim Crow system of segregation across the South. But in Thomas, perennial Ku Klux Klan Man of the Year, we have a self-hating Tom who would've agreed with the Dred Scott decision to return escaped slaves back to their masters had he been on the bench in the 1850s.

Today, America is at its most divided since the Civil War, with half the country opposing, half still staunchly supporting Bush's unprovoked aggression against the non-White people of Iraq in the name of freedom. But public opinion polls show that African-Americans have been skeptical of their own country's intentions from the very start.

Why? Because the United States was founded on the notion of manifest destiny, a racist rationalization of territorial expansion, including the enslavement of Africans and the slaughtering of Native Americans by the White man, all in the name of democracy. Resorting to the rallying cry, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," Congress supported the U.S. Army's ethnic cleansing of the red man "from sea to shining sea."

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Quiet activism as vital to civil rights as trailblazing

By Marc H. Morial
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Less than a month ago the nation marked the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision in the Brown v. Board of Education school desegregation case.

That decision, in launching the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s; provoked a decade and more of the spectacular events — marches and demonstrations, and yes, violent acts which claimed the lives of brave, good people — that produced a vast expansion of freedom and justice and opportunity in America.

But the African-American quest for the full measure of their American citizenship before and during the years it exploded across the American landscape was always marked far more by what I call "quiet activism."

By that I mean the behind-the-scenes work that garnered no headlines and drew little attention, but was absolutely crucial to forging the development of individuals and ex-

panding the bonds of community within Black America that made the Movement at the local and national levels possible.

I've been impressed anew with the quiet activism that's going on all over Black America because I've just returned from a five-day tour of National Urban League's affiliates in Illinois, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio as part of the prelude to our 2004 Annual Conference in Detroit, July 21 to 25.

Our tour was the old-fashioned barnstorming kind: We did it by a specially-outfitted National Urban League bus, crisis-crossing the central Midwest from Chicago to Gary, Indiana to Muskegon, Muskegon Heights and Grand Rapids, and on to Akron, Cleveland, and Elyria, Ohio.

We called it our "Empowerment Bus Tour" as a means of reinforcing for their citizens our five-point empowerment agenda — focused on education, economic self-sufficiency, a healthy lifestyle, civic engagement and pro-

To Be Equal

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tection of civil rights — for all Americans.

But it was those of us from our national headquarters office who were most inspired by seeing again the varied ways people in these communities have banded together to try to make life better for themselves and their neighbors.

In Chicago, as guest of the Chicago Urban League, we met with business leaders and conferred with the staffs of two pioneer African-American publications, Ebony and Jet magazines.

Then, we rolled on to Gary, where the Urban League of Northwest Indiana staged a truly special event.

hearing what being able to read well meant to these youngsters. "It was great, second-grader Dwonae Dodd, told a reporter for Gary's Post-Tribune newspaper, "I liked it because I got to read in front of a lot of people. I liked it because I felt I was one with the crowd. I just love to read."

In Muskegon, Muskegon Heights and Grand Rapids, Michigan and Elyria, Ohio we saw cities, hit hard by the transformations of the American and global workplace, fighting hard and successfully to maintain themselves as viable communities.

In Akron and Cleveland, Ohio, we saw Urban League affiliates, among the oldest in our 105-member affiliate network, open or preview the design for new, expansive headquarters.

The Cleveland affiliate's new headquarters includes a multicultural business center, intended to develop a cadre of Black and Latino entrepreneurs to help anchor and re-develop urban communities.

In Akron, now in the midst of a capital campaign, the new site of our affiliate there will rise amid a planned educational and cultural complex: It's on the same block as a proposed new elementary school, just down the street from the headquarters of the city library, around the corner from the Akron Zoo, and near an eleven-acre city sports complex and the city's special school for the visual and performing arts.

The location of Akron's new headquarters underscores how deeply a part of the overall fabric of their communities our affiliates are. In every city on our tour, a cross-section of the community — elected officials, business and civic leaders and people who had been directly helped by Urban League staff — came out to greet us.

They came out, not, I was heartened to see, as a tribute to us, but as a tribute to the leaders and staff of our affiliates — the quiet activists working on the front lines of the movement for social justice for America.