

C O M M E N T A R Y

Kerry, Bush different in dramatic, important ways

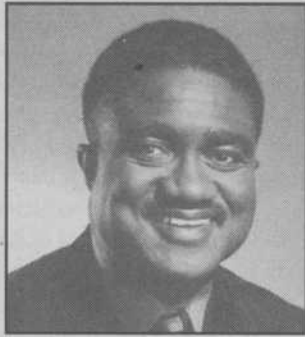
By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Many non-voters rationalize their behavior by arguing that there isn't a dime's worth of differences between political candidates. That's been said so often that some people actually believe it. Just as the NAACP did earlier this year, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies made public a report this week showing there are indeed major differences between George W. Bush and John Kerry.

Kerry returned his responses to the Joint Center questionnaire on August 17. Bush failed to reply, forcing the Joint Center to rely on his campaign documents and Web site.

Replying to the questionnaire, Kerry wrote, "I am a strong supporter of affirmative action... I agree with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in... Grutter v. Bollinger (the University of Michigan Law School case that the court upheld)... which held that public colleges and universities may consider race in admissions as a way of increasing diversity. I also agree with the companion case of Gratz v. Bollinger (University of Michigan undergraduate case that the court struck down)... that quotas are constitutionally impermissible."

The report notes, "Although the mate-



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rial we were able to review did not specifically address this issue, President Bush, through his Justice Department, filed briefs with the Supreme Court expressing support for diverse student bodies in higher education, but opposing the affirmative action plans of the University of Michigan in both cases."

The Joint Center wrote to the candidates, "A number of states with large Black populations continue to have a representation of the Confederate flag on their state flag. Would you recommend to those states that they remove the image from their state flags?"

Kerry responded, "Yes. The Confederate flag is a hurtful and divisive symbol for many Americans of all races. It's a piece of history, and like other historical objects it belongs in a museum."

The Joint Center noted that although Bush did not reply to the questionnaire, "President Bush has previously expressed the view that this decision should be left to the states."

Interestingly, neither candidate gave a direct answer when asked: "Do you think that the government should set aside a percentage of contracts for firms controlled by women and minorities in order to deal

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Pro-Bush folks skewering history without impugntity

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The recent uproar around Senator Kerry's Vietnam War record prompted by the pro-Bush attack ads obscures at least four key points.

One, the Vietnam War ended almost 30 years ago, yet the wounds that it created have become a deep part of the U.S. psyche. It is striking that in the midst of the illegal Iraq war and occupation; increasing poverty and lack of healthcare; growing wealth polarization; rising hatred of the U.S. overseas, that the main battle on the US political scene can be over events that transpired more than 30 years ago.

Two, Kerry actually fought in a war, while the record seems to indicate that President Bush — while never opposing the war — did all that he could in order to avoid fighting in one. Nevertheless, Bush's so-called military record is left relatively untouched, while the focus is on whether Kerry actually sustained real wounds and whether he went into Cambodia. How close to Cambodia did President Bush go, I would ask pro-Bush veterans?

Three, the Vietnam War was a criminal, immoral enterprise conducted by successive U.S. presidential administrations at the cost of more than 52,000 U.S. lives, and



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perhaps 2,000,000 Vietnamese. If we wish to honor those killed in this war, we must first admit that they should never have been fighting it. The war was based on lies and plotting by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon as part of their Cold War calculations. This fact has been completely ignored in the debate about Kerry's record.

Four, atrocities were committed by U.S. troops. That does not mean that each and every soldier, sailor and airman engaged in atrocities. That would be a ridiculous argument. The massacre, however, at My Lai was not an isolated situation.

When I turned 18, the draft was ended. Like many other young men of my generation, I had no interest in going to Vietnam, and vehemently opposed the war. After getting out of college, I had the honor and opportunity to meet and speak with many Vietnam vets. While they each had different takes on the war, the horror of the war was conveyed in virtually every discussion.

The horror was not an abstraction. Whether with guilt, anger or disgust, I was told of atrocities committed by U.S. troops. The Vietnam War dehumanized otherwise normal individuals and forced them into

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Black museums: Valued but not viewed as valuable

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

As I thought about the millions of dollars for the planning, designing, erecting, marketing, and now celebrating of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (NURFC) in Cincinnati, my visit to the Harriet Tubman home and museum in Auburn, N.Y. came to mind. I had the privilege to stop by the Tubman memorial this summer. As I walked around the room where the artifacts and photos are displayed, not only was I filled with emotions, I was also struck by the understated remembrances of this revered Black woman called "The Moses of Her People."

Of course, as I introduced myself to the manager of the museum, I began to think about what I could do to help maintain this treasure. I wondered if I would ever get those 200,000 names for the Blackonomics Million Dollar Club and how great it would be if we could give \$1 million to the Tubman Home. I also thought about the millions of Black folks, and White folks, too, who celebrate Mother Tubman's legacy, and I mused about the possibilities and the obligation we have to support this historical place with our dollars.

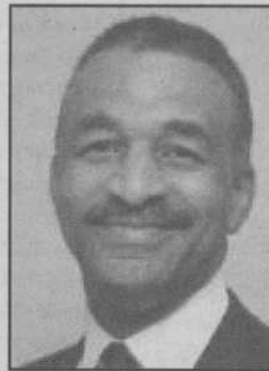
When I visited the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, Ala., I had the same feeling. And, as we are well aware, there are several other museums and memorials that commemorate our ancestors and their struggle for freedom in this country, and we must find ways to support them all.

The custodian of the Tubman House, which

sits on 26 acres of land, is the A.M.E. Church, which has taken on several responsibilities supporting Black colleges and other causes. They should be commended for their foresight, their sacrifice, and for carrying on the legacy of Richard Allen, who founded the "Free" African Society. They understand that Black folks must not only value the remnants of our ancestors, we must also understand they are valuable as well, and we must take care of them.

Harriet Tubman's valiant efforts have been co-opted by thousands of people and many organizations for commercial purposes only. For instance, the NURFC in Cincinnati has a contribution category called the Harriet Tubman Society; it is for those who donate \$250,000 - \$999,000 to the Freedom Center. You will not find a statue of Mother Tubman in the center, however. Is she valued or just valuable?

Part of the Freedom Center's mission is "to inspire people to speak up in the face of injustice and for the spirit of freedom," which is certainly something Harriet Tubman did, and it is certainly what the demonstrators on the streets of Cincinnati did in opposition to the celebration gala held at the Freedom Center. You will not find their names on the "Everyday Freedom Fighters" list posted in the Freedom Center. Are they valued? Or, is



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what they fight against just valuable?

Two points can be made regarding this juxtaposition of principles against profit. Black folks came to Cincinnati from across this country to celebrate the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, which was conceived by a White man, a good man whom I know and with whom I have worked. The initial funding for the center

came from White corporate executives, and the support for the fundraising, management, and marketing came via Procter & Gamble and its loaned executive, Ed Rigaud.

Black folks jumped aboard this center bandwagon and supported it with their dollars, their talents, and their presence at the gala. Oprah Winfrey gave at least \$1 million to the cause and came to Cincinnati to celebrate as well, while the real "everyday freedom fighters" were protesting outside. There was a news account that Winfrey will ask the readers of her magazines to come to Cincinnati to visit the center as well, and you know if Oprah asks it will be done. It looks to me like the Freedom Center is both valued and valuable to those Black folks who were so eager to support it and walk down the red carpet to celebrate at the gala.

On the other hand, museums and memorials established, managed, and maintained by Black people struggle every day for support,

not just from Black people but from White people as well. These institutions, for the most part, languish in anonymity and, as Joann Bland shared with me at the Voting Rights Museum in Selma, as I watched a bus load of White people walking through the museum, it seems our people don't care as much about Black museums as White folks do. She said most of those who visit are White. Do we value the Voting Rights Museum or is it just valuable for co-opting in our speeches and platitudes regarding our past victories?

The Freedom Center is a \$110 million facility that is, as admitted by its director, Spencer Crew, not just a Black museum; it is a center that encompasses the freedom struggles of other groups as well. It is a multicultural freedom potpourri that highlights "Everyday Freedom Fighters" such as Carl Lindner, a Cincinnati billionaire, and others whose bona fides for fighting for freedom are questionable at best. The Freedom Center is both valued and valuable to those who brought it to fruition and who now control it, and to those Black folks who came to celebrate and wrote checks.

Black museums are operating on meager budgets, valued by Black folks, yes, but obviously not valuable to us because we will not support them the way we support the institutions of others.

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