

Two Black GOP women offer differing tales

By Ron Walters
Special to Sentinel-Voice

One of the ironies of being Black in America is that even in the 21st century, we have to respect the "two-ness" of that quality of being Black that W. E. B. DuBois spoke about in his famous 1903 book, "The Souls of Black Folks." The two-ness is a consciousness of being: one, of African origin, with a special history of struggle against odds in America; and, also, an American, part of a grand experiment in multiracial, multinational living under the goal of achieving a democratic state bounded by equal rights and opportunities.

This quality relates to two prominent Republican women, one well known and one not so famous. The famous one is Condoleezza Rice, the new Secretary of State.

When I have been asked by the media whether I am proud that a Black woman has been finally named to such a post, I say yes. Then, I quickly caution them that what is important about her is that she is Secretary of State for Americans, not just Blacks. As such, she will be carrying out the policies of the president and that is the important criterion of assessment as it was with Powell.

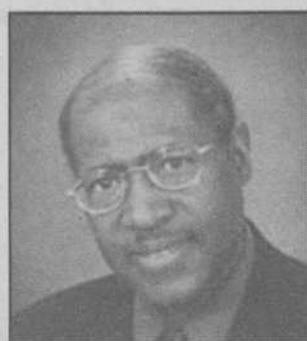
In this sense, there is a certain value to her role in the State Department that is unique. She is very close to President George Bush, affirmed by the fact that at her swearing-in

ceremony at the State Department he said that he and his wife "loved her" and then wondered aloud whether he was supposed to admit it.

This quality will be the determining factor in her administration, and when she speaks, it will be recognized by foreign leaders that it is the voice of George Bush talking.

So we should get it, too. By agreeing to be the Secretary of State, she has also agreed to be the unquestioning megaphone for a set of highly questionable ideas about how America should use its power abroad in the 21st century. The war in Iraq is the signature policy of this administration, and it has corrupted the image of this country abroad with its long time allies and deeply poisoned the view of Americans to many young Muslims for generations.

This war is not based on "spreading democracy," but this has been used to cover up more practical motives of the control of oil by a clique of wealthy oilmen in America and the Middle East; the dispensation of lucrative contracts to corporate friends; the enhancement of the security of Israel, and watering of the Right-wing movement in this country that has always been hawkish. Spreading democracy in this manner means depriving needy



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communities in this country of the resources they need for personal and collective development. That is the consequence of Condoleezza's mandate; should we cheer about that?

The other Black Republican woman is not as well known as Condoleezza. She is Kay James Cole, head of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). She was Secretary of Health and Human Services in the administration of the then-governor of Virginia, George Allen, now a stalwart of the radical right in the U. S. Senate.

Cole has announced her departure, having completed the task of changing the personnel rules for the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services.

She leaves OPM, having just participated in changing pay and personnel rules for 850,000 civil servants in the newly created department of Homeland Security. These rules make it easier for people to be relieved of their jobs and places salary and upward advancement more dependently on performance reviews.

Blacks are heavily employed by government at every level, with about 25 percent in

the federal employment, so such changes in rules provide a dangerously subjective tool for the largely White supervisory force to severely weaken Black federal employment.

This has been a goal of conservatives for some time, and Stephen Barr of the *Washington Post* feels that these changes open the door for changes at other key cabinet agencies.

The changes at Homeland Security were designed, to some extent, with the backing of the federal employee unions on the grounds that it was a highly sensitive agency. But cabinet secretaries at other agencies have noticed the new rules and have voiced an intention to employ them, putting the federal employee unions on the defensive and creating the possibility of a series of future court battles.

This is almost certain, since many of these agencies appear to want to discard the historic 15-grade general schedule for federal employment and its built-in protections for personnel.

So, we are proud of Rice and Coles, in one instance, but the impact of their roles would do so much to harm the opportunity for Blacks in this country. That is how they must be judged, not by their color or gender.

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Black America struggling to understand Condi Rice

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A strange and unsettling silence came over Black America during the confirmation hearings for Condoleezza Rice, after her nomination to replace Colin Powell as Secretary of State. While there were some African-American cheerleaders who applauded her nomination, most of Black America remained quite silent.

Contrary to its relationship with General Powell, Black America has not had anything approaching a love affair with Rice. While her intelligence and academic background is respected, she is generally not liked. She is viewed as cold and distant. Despite her Birmingham, Ala., background and knowledge of the Civil Rights Era, Condoleezza Rice is not viewed so much as part of Black America as much as an oddity within Black America. Her strident, pro-empire views and her willingness to openly proselytize for the warmongering policies of the Bush administration have not endeared her to most African-Americans.

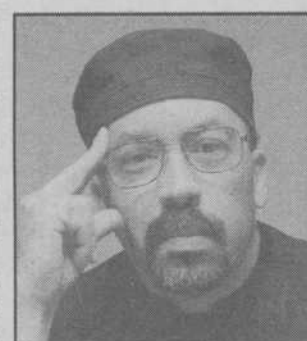
Having said this, however, we have to account for the failure of African-Americans

to speak out against her. The reality is that Black Americans are very reluctant to speak out against other Blacks unless the individuals are complete buffoons. Even then, when a Black American rises on the social, economic or political hierarchy, there is a tendency for us to give that person the benefit of the doubt regardless of what that person has done.

The operating philosophy seems to be that since White America is always attacking us and undermining our leaders (and other prominent individuals), why should we jump on the pile with our own criticisms?

While the philosophy of silence or benign neglect is understandable given the assaults we have been forced to confront, it presents a major problem in addressing the dilemmas facing Black America in the first decade of the 21st century.

This became very obvious in the context of the now famous exchange between noted actor and human rights activist Harry



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Belafonte and then Secretary of State Colin Powell, when the former accused the latter of being a 'house slave.'

Very quickly the circumstance of the exchange was reduced to a discussion of courtesy, diplomacy and even the question of the actual role of house slaves in the antebellum South, rather than a focus on the political criticism being offered of Powell by Belafonte. Various Black individuals came to the defense of Powell because he was a respected Black man in a substantial position, ignoring the issues underlying the Belafonte/Powell exchange.

What unsettles many of us is that we are being forced to choose directions in a manner that is different from the past. From slavery through the tail end of the era of Civil Rights and Black Power, those who countered the interests of the majority of Black Americans were generally the traditional Uncle Toms and Aunt Jemimas. They were often caricatures possessing no or little base, advanced

by conservative White America to tell the other side of the story, so to speak. These individuals were an embarrassment, and were generally treated as such.

As a result of the Civil Rights and Black Power era, Black Americans are included in many high places in corporate America and within the government. The appointment of Powell and Rice in prominent positions in the Bush administration was not only a political coup for Bush, but also recognition that it was no longer acceptable to place Black Americans only in positions sitting by the door.

Nevertheless, in occupying these positions, these individuals (and others who have held or are holding such positions) have had to make decisions regarding whose interests they represent. Thus, a noted academic like Rice, who has impeccable credentials, cannot be thought of as anyone's caricature or Aunt Jemima. She is clear; she is well spoken; she is very intelligent; and she is openly siding with forces that represent the antithesis of nearly everything for which Black Americans have fought.

Black America, then, faces a quandary. (See Fletcher, Page 13)

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for their birds regularly and treated them pretty well, but at least one of those chicken's fate was sealed just before dinner.

What has our beloved NAACP become? It can write letters of support against the mistreatment of chickens, but fails to show up or speak out against the mistreatment of Black folks; and I am not talking about mistreatment in Waffle Houses.

I mean economic mistreatment, police brutality and murder, and mistreatment of our children, namely, the right of police officers to electrocute seven year-olds with tasers in Cincinnati, Ohio.

It strikes out against waffle servers for their mistreatment of Black customers but leads no charge for Blacks to economically empower ourselves by investing our dollars in or own national chain of waffle houses. If the new civil rights struggle is economic empowerment, then those who make such a claim should be at the head of the pack leading us there.

The time for fighting for food service is over. Let those who are mistreated file their lawsuit, get paid, and start supporting their own businesses. Maybe some of the millions they collect from the transgressors could be invested in new Black businesses.

Chicken and waffles? I guess I could have used another play on words to describe what the NAACP is doing. For example, I could have accused it of being "chicken," afraid to go against the establishment with anything of substance; and I could use the phrase we heard so many times during the presidential campaign, "waffling" on its mission. But, I think you get the point. More importantly, I hope the NAACP gets the point.

I have never had chicken and waffles together, Roscoe's notwithstanding, but in this case they don't sound very appealing. (By the way, can anyone in L.A. tell me if Roscoe's is Black-owned?)

We have fought against so many things during the past 50 years of our civil rights struggle. Instead of trying to be accommodated by condescending White restaurant owners and giving deference to chickens, we must use much more of our interest and energy to economically empower ourselves. If we make and sell our own waffles, in our own restaurants, we can determine how we will be treated. If we raised, processed, and sold our own chickens, we could determine how they are treated. I rest my case.

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