

Right cross, left hook—A Black political TKO

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Black folks, we need to change our conversation. For the past 40 years, most of our conversation has been about politics. Most of our efforts have been centered on politics. Reminiscent of Reconstruction, when Blacks occupied political offices for the first time, many of our politicians are just figureheads, toothless tigers, and lackeys for the establishment. Many of them are simply "employed" and are only concerned about keeping their "jobs." Many Black politicians actually work harder on behalf of others than they do for their own brothers and sisters. I am suggesting that we change our conversation; change it from politics as usual to economics unusual.

Before you political hacks get angry, let me say that we must continue to be involved in politics. We must run for office and we must vote, by all means. But we cannot afford to stop there. We saw what happened in Florida in 2000, and we saw what happened in Ohio in 2004; both times Black folks were told to "go out and vote." We were told we must vote in even greater numbers in 2004 than we did in 2000. We did it, and we still cannot even get a hearing on reparations. P. Diddy told the young people to, "Vote or die." They voted, and when it comes to economic empowerment, they, and we, are nearly dead. Like I said in a previous article, where is the "Start a business or die" campaign, the "Pool our money or die" campaign?

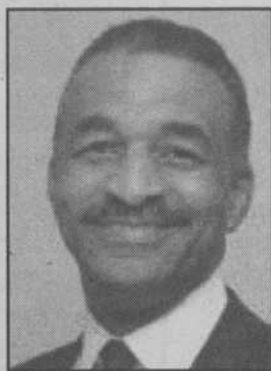
In my neck of the woods, there are Black politicians who do absolutely nothing for Black folks, but they come out every year or two to tell us how good they have been and what they stand for on our behalf. What a

load of fertilizer. Even stranger is the fact that Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives do the same things. We may duck the "right" cross, but we will still get hit by the "left" hook. In other words, we have nothing coming from either political party, and they have proven that to us time and time again.

Our conversation must move away from the dead-end discussions on who is in and who is out this year; it makes no difference if we get nothing from whoever is in office. Our practice of engaging in political discourse, ad nauseam, as if we control something up there on the hill or down in city hall, is old and tired. Black people must realize that while our relatives fought for and died for voting rights, those folks didn't die so we could spend the majority of our time "playing" politics. They wanted us to take our participation to the next level. What ever happened to that Black political party discussion from 1972? Black folks, your relatives and mine, also lost their lives because they chose to go into business; where is the rallying cry around that?

We must also come to the realization that if our vaunted voting "power" is so fearful to the two political parties, we should be using it in ways that support the most important political principle: Quid pro quo. Leveraging our votes to get something for our people is what we should be doing. Otherwise, why participate at all — just to be participating?

It really doesn't matter what color the poli-



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tician is. What matters most is what Black folks are getting from the system. And, believe me, Black folks are getting the shaft from many Black politicians. You know it, I know it, and they know it. It's bad enough that the leadership in the two major parties really don't care about us. One is throwing right crosses and the other is throwing left hooks at us, always causing us to be off-balance, out of sync, and off-kilter, as we try to avoid those haymakers. The political "leaders" who continue to tell us that all we have to do is vote to change things should be voted out of office. The Black political "leaders" who always come calling for Black votes and votes for their parties, Democrat or Republican, should be run out of town. This voting for all Democrats or all Republicans by Black folks is nothing short of political suicide,

because both parties have shown us they couldn't care less about what we think or what we do. Just look at the last presidential election.

The old game of Black folks being all or nothing to either party has proven to be our political demise. We give our all and get nothing in return. Seventy-five years ago, nearly all Blacks voted Republican; now, we have just the opposite. Neither scenario has worked, so why do we continue that insanity?

Carter G. Woodson said, "Any people who would vote the same way for three generations without thereby obtaining results ought to be ignored and disenfranchised."

Black folks have been getting hit with right crosses and left hooks since we got into this political game, and now we need to start throwing some punches of our own. The hardest punches Black people can throw are economic punches. Yes, we can start our own
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their peers were going to pass to the next grade leaving them behind, then the stigma attached to being left behind would provide some incentive for children to try harder to excel. But since they have no incentive, knowing they can be passed whether they have all A's or all F's or passed simply according to age, many children don't care.

Nationally, Black children in society are still offered only a "share croppers education" — an education designed to prepare them for manual labor — many Black educators in Las Vegas are committed and not afraid to go up against the mainstream agenda to fight for Black academic excellence.

The problem is we don't have enough Black educators with this type of commitment to meet the needs of all of the students in Clark County. Therefore, we have a disproportionate number of Black children being tracked into special education.

Willa White, a retired psychologist and social worker who worked 23 years with the Clark County School District was one of those committed educators. She said she became a psychologist because when she came to the district she was assigned to the sixth grade centers and found it so disturbing that Black and Latino children were being disproportionately and unduly classified as educationally mentally retarded that she asked what could be done to rectify or mitigate the problem and went on to do just that.

What she is most proud of doing, in conjunction with other Black educators, was re-educating the district and getting them to change the classification from educationally

mentally retarded to learning disabled.

She acknowledges that there were some children who shouldn't have been classified at all but says that special education shouldn't be bashed because many of our children have benefited from it and have gone on to become productive. She believes that the main focus regarding our children in the Clark County School District should be centered on an understanding of the Individual Education Program.

She says that "mentors, educators and people who understand the IEP or have the ability to understand the IEP should be willing to go with parents to help them interpret the plan and have an understanding as to what their roles and rights are as it relates to placement and non-placement of their children."

Overall, our children have many needs whether they have learning challenges and need remediation or have excellent academic skills.

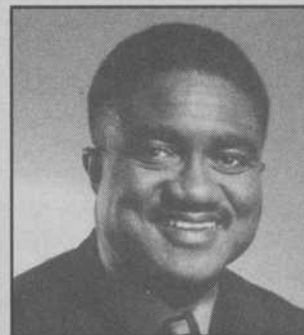
Whether they need intervention or if they are behaving well, all children need discipline and the opportunity to grow and advance. We all must be involved in supporting children and their parents to encourage better education.

In conclusion, it is imperative that we as a people — the village—put our children's lives into perspective. There is nothing wrong with African-Americans wanting all of the things that other people have, but we can't be so busy chasing the almighty dollar that we lose our next generation and generations to come. Let's get back to the basics of making the education of our children and ourselves a priority.

Even more disconcerting news about Newsweek

By George E. Curry
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The uproar over Newsweek's report that a government official saw an investigatory file about interrogators at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, flushing a Qur'an down a toilet to rattle detainees misses many larger, more salient points. In retracting the



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original story, *Newsweek* Editor Mark Whittaker didn't say that the act had never occurred. Rather, he said the magazine relied on a source now uncertain that he read the charge in files compiled by the Southern Command (SouthCom), which oversees the Guantanamo prison. In fact, a story in that same issue, written by Evan Thomas, raises even more questions about alleged abuse at the military facility. He mentioned that Mike Isikoff, co-author of the original *Newsweek* item, checked back with his original source.

"On Saturday, Isikoff spoke to his original source, the senior government official, who said that he clearly recalled reading investigative reports about mishandling the Qur'an, including a toilet incident. But the official, still speaking anonymously, could no longer be sure that these concerns had surfaced in the SouthCom report."

Note that the story stated that the source "clearly recalled" reading reports about the incident, but was unsure it was in the SouthCom report. In the aftermath of the riots in Afghanistan, the *Newsweek* reporter did additional digging.

"Isikoff had contacted a New York defense lawyer, Marc Falkoff, who is representing 13 Yemeni detainees at Guantanamo. According to Falkoff's declassified notes, a mass-suicide attempt — when 23 detainees tried to hang or strangle themselves in August 2003 — was triggered by a guard's dropping a Qur'an and stomping on it.

One of Falkoff's clients told him, "Another detainee tried to kill himself after the

guard took his Qur'an and threw it in the toilet." An Army spokesman dismissed those accounts as being unbelievable.

Who would have thought the charges of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad would have been believable without those graphic photographs?

White House spokesman Scott McClellan has expressed outrage that *Newsweek* would go to press with such limited documentation. He called the apology "a good first step" and said the magazine should explain "what happened and why they got it wrong, particularly to people in the region." If that's the standard, then the Bush administration also has plenty of explaining to do.

As Rep. Fortney "Pete" Stark (D-Calif.) said, "The administration is chastising *Newsweek* for a story that contained a fact that turned out to be false. This is the same administration that lied to Congress, the United Nations and the American people by fabricating reasons to send us to war."

If anything, *Newsweek* has been too cozy with government officials. The magazine story by Evan Thomas notes, "National Security Correspondent John Barry, realizing the sensitivity of the story, provided a draft of the *Newsweek* 'Periscope' item to a senior Defense official, asking, 'Is this accurate or not?'"

When the official challenged one aspect of the item, the story says, "the Periscope draft was corrected to reflect that."

Newsweek should be embarrassed — not because it made a mistake, but because it went to government officials and showed them drafts of a story prior to publication. Evidently, seeking government approval happens more often than journalists like to admit. Two years ago, Eason Jordan, head of CNN's news division, admitted

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