

Run-off referendum on Nagin's moxie

By Ron Walters
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Any time you have an election with an elected official already in office and running for re-election, the election is largely about that person's leadership in office. In other words, it is a referendum on the leadership provided by him or her in their previous tenure in office.

In this case, the referendum on Ray Nagin, sitting Mayor of New Orleans is complicated by the response to hurricane Katrina and the aftermath. I have been among those who have resisted blaming Nagin for the fact that all of those Black people ended up at the Superdome.

The record shows that he issued what amounted to an evacuation order that was effective for 82 percent of the population, but his actions in caring for the remaining portion of the population, are in question. For me the questions alone were these: Was he alone responsible for the flaw in the existing evacuation plan that had been prepared over several majors and overseen by the federal government; was he alone responsible for trying to move 20 percent of the population of New Orleans out of the city with inadequate

resources; what could he do when the city was effectively under water and neither the state government, nor the Federal government acted propitiously to rescue people.

I am not absolving Nagin of his share of the responsibilities, but I do not think that much of what happened can be blamed on him. In any case, my views aside, because they don't matter and shouldn't matter in this election. Nagin will have his hands full in the May 20 runoff against Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu.

In the aftermath of the debacle in New Orleans, there were hints that Nagin was still looking out for the interests of the business community rather than those of Blacks when seemed to take the position that the Ninth Ward might not be rebuilt, first was the moratorium proposed by his commission that was rejected strongly by citizens. Then his final view that all of the city would be rebuilt, but that if people came back to the Ninth Ward it would be at their own expense. I haven't found anybody who knows exactly what that



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means, but I have been impressed by his tendency to change positions in the light of strong citizen opposition.

In the most recent poll in the election, Nagin scored a surprising 40 percent support among Blacks, while Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu drew 28 percent. Because of such strong Black support, Nagin finished in first place Saturday, but must still compete in the runoff.

Landrieu benefits from his relatives, his sister Mary Landrieu, sitting Senator from the state, and his father, the last White mayor of New Orleans. Ron Forman, head of the Audubon and manager of several successful high profile projects, together with Landrieu were the hope of Whites, with Nagin being supported by just 5 percent of Whites in the poll, Landrieu 26 percent and Forman getting the lion's share of 30 percent the White support.

In a field of 22 candidates, no one came out with a majority last Saturday. Nagin was the top voter-getter. He now has a good chance of being re-elected, especially if he

can pick off some of Landrieu's Black support. Regardless of who wins the May 20 runoff, I have been impressed with the efforts organizations led by the Louisiana Voting Rights Network, the National Coalition of Black Civic Participation and their legal allies, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the National Bar Association, and support given by the National Urban League, the NAACP and the National Rainbow/Push Coalition that have plotted voter mobilization tactics, voter protection tactics, and how to provide transportation and other support services that enable folks in the state to vote.

Based on Saturday's voting, it seems like Black voters are willing to let Ray Nagin, a Republican most of his adult life, "come home," something he has been trying to do, albeit clumsily, for some time now. He does not really seem to be cut from the same cloth as George W. Bush — plowing the same losing ground, hoping victory will emerge, unresponsive to a public that is crying for change.

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Rally

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students helped organize with the NAACP and the family's law firm, Parks and Crump.

Jackson exhorted the protesters to vote this election year and made reference to the "stolen" election of 2000, in which 537 votes made George Bush president.

"Today, we thank Martin. His death made us come alive. Not far from the crucifixion is the resurrection day," Jackson said.

Many stuck Band-Aids to their foreheads to signify Martin's beating, carried life-size placards bearing a picture of the child in his coffin and wore black shirts saying, "The Next Emmett Till???" a reference to the black youth who was kidnapped and killed in Mississippi in 1955 and exhumed in 2005.

Martin was exhumed for a second autopsy requested by Bush and a special prosecutor after the Bay County medical examiner, Charles Siebert, determined he died of natural causes from sickle-cell trait, a blood disorder mostly affecting African-Americans. The results of the second autopsy have not been made public yet, but a preliminary statement from the office of the special prosecutor on the case said it shows Martin did not die of natural causes.

Siebert has made numerous public statements against the "special interests" blasting his professionalism, pointing out that there is no medical evidence disputing his finding.

Many experts, though, disagree, and Jackson



Demonstrators made up of largely students of Florida A&M University, Florida State University and Tallahassee Community College march to the Capitol on Friday in Tallahassee, Fla., to protest how the state has handled the death of a Black teenager who was punched and kicked by guards at a juvenile detention boot camp. The teen eventually died.

Clingman

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my book, Black-O-Knowledge, Stuff we need to know. It is an excerpt from Compa\$\$ionate Capitali\$im by Ta-Nehisi Coates. "Forty years [after his death], it's easy to quote Malcolm and put him on a postage stamp — now that we've killed him. Martin Luther King, Jr. was ultimately abandoned by the civil rights establishment for his stand against poverty and war. Today he has a national holiday, and even conservatives have to honor him — now that he's no longer here to shame them. Ditto for the Black Panthers. Everybody says their dad wore a black beret—now that J. Edgar Hoover isn't alive to tap their phones.

Progressive vision almost always lacks mass appeal. While possibly enjoying a bit of rebellious sheen, prophetic insight is decidedly uncool; it involves the sacrifice of family livelihoods, the sully of reputations, and, at worst, death. Only the afterglow is romantic. Everybody says they would have fought with Nat Turner—now that none of us are slaves."

Pray for the family of Kabaka Oba.

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pointed out that he has had sickle-cell trait for his 65 years and never died from it.

Sharpton, a failed Democratic presidential candidate in 2004, suggested Siebert had a racial motive.

"In many ways, they were only distorting the truth. Many of us feel that Martin was killed because of an African-American trait: That you were Black in the hands of those that don't respect Black rights in the state of Florida," Sharpton said.

Bush, who at times has had strained relations with African-Americans, met with Sharpton and Jackson shortly

after the rally and prayed with them for justice. Bush had earlier expressed relief that his Florida Department of Law Enforcement chief, Tunnell, had stepped down Thursday.

Tunnell, the former Bay County sheriff who founded the boot camp, had refused to release a videotape of Martin's beating until The Miami Herald sued to make it public. The newspaper learned of the tape from Miami Beach Rep. Dan Gelber, a Democrat, and Gus Barreiro, the only Republican to participate in the march and speak to the sit-in

protesters this week.

Tunnell's agency was embarrassed under his watch when the special prosecutor kicked the agency off the case after The Miami Herald reported that during the investigation, Tunnell sent cozy e-mails to the Bay County sheriff who ran the Panama City boot camp.

In a reference to the comments Tunnell made about Obama and Jackson, Bush said the former FDLE chief "made a joke that was inappropriate." Bush said he didn't know the specifics. "I thought it was appropriate to move on."

Jackson declined to comment on Tunnell's comparing him to a Wild West outlaw, saying "name-calling is a diversionary tactic." But Sharpton, who had already electrified the crowd when he compared the alleged players in the case to cockroaches scampering from a kitchen light, didn't hold his tongue.

"It's scary this guy was in charge of this department having those kinds of sentiments," Sharpton said. "Imagine what decisions he made down through the years, for however long he served, reflecting that kind of attitude. It's scary."