

# Nagin on third in New Orleans' race

By Ron Walters

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Ray Nagin is poised to score in the runoff election May 20, by polling 38 percent of the vote and finishing first in the recent New Orleans mayoral primary election. But there is, for me — and many others — a basic question: Will he score, and does it matter?

By winning the Black vote in the recent election, it seems like Blacks are willing to let Nagin, initially supported by the business community, "come on home" which he has been trying to do, albeit clumsily, for some time now.

It might just work, since he does not really seem to be unresponsive to a public that is crying to be heard. The signal he sent that New Orleans should return to being a "Chocolate City" and his rejection of some recommendations of his rebuilding commission are evidence of this attitude.

The primary election, however, was not about the candidates per se, it was really about two things they symbolized: racial politics and what kind of change each contestant is offering. None of the leading candidates, however, offered a compelling vision of change. And because voters could not see clear programs to vote for, they resorted to the tradition of racial politics.

Whites voted largely for Mitch Landrieu (29 percent), Ron Forman (17 percent) and Rob Couhig (10 percent), and, at the moment,

the animus of White voters against Nagin for offering a vision of a continued Black control makes his program incompatible with their interests.

Thus, Whites will probably give Landrieu most of their vote in the runoff. With 62 percent of the voters going against Nagin in the primary, and White turnout at about 50 percent to 30 percent for Blacks, Landrieu appears to be in a good position. The question is, how much of that 62 percent will Nagin take away?

The low voter turnout of Blacks is one manifestation of all the things critics of the election were voicing about the formidable barriers to voting. In some ways, the higher turnout of Whites was pre-ordained since, by my calculations, most of the precinct voting stations that were changed were in the Black community, which meant that disproportionately, Whites could vote in relatively familiar voting stations.

Nevertheless, thousands of ballots were invalidated in this election system, approved by the Justice Department, because of either voter ID problems or the late receipt of absentee ballots. This system must now be corrected for the runoff.

Most important, the right to vote must be



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expanded. Louisiana Secretary of State Al Ater says that he cannot order other states to set up satellites voting stations for displaced New Orleans voters and the federal government has taken no action.

But since he has made no public formal request for satellite stations to be established in other states and the Bush administration has taken no action, this conspiracy of non-action may be intended to affect a change in the racial politics of the city.

Without some responsibility taken by the state and federal government to expand the right of displaced citizens to vote, the 30 percent turnout of Blacks may look like a minor miracle in hindsight. In fact, Black turnout will have to affect a real miracle if Nagin is to stand a chance.

Working against Nagin, the low turnout could also mean that those who have been displaced, especially outside the State of Louisiana, have not seen the kind of program that is attractive enough for them to take the trouble to vote; in short, a program by which they could envision resuming their lives in the city.

In this respect, there is much riding on the nature of the programs that each candidate places before the electorate in this period, up

to the runoff, and strategy by which it is delivered.

That leads to the question of what each candidate means in the debate over "change." Change has become a code word among Whites in New Orleans for the death of the Black political regime. As one White member of the state legislature said on the floor, with most Blacks gone, "the Reconstruction is finally over."

But the Reconstruction made New Orleans what it was — a unique city with a cultural presentation like no other, a jewel in the American crown to be admired and a legacy to be preserved. Will Nagin and Landrieu offer to restore the jewel or to cast it aside and place the future under the management of those who made the Reconstruction necessary in the first place?

Look closely at the programs that will be offered. The rebuilding process will place a Black mayor in a position to influence more economic resources than any other Black politician in America. Has America ever trusted that role to a Black man?

Since the answer to this question may ultimately determine the outcome of the election, the Black citizens of New Orleans have to know the answer to that question and determine whether the fight to reverse that history and increase their power is worth it.

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## Powell forces Rice to defend Iraq planning

WASHINGTON (AP) - Just back from Baghdad and eager to discuss promising developments, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice found herself knocked off message Sunday, forced to defend prewar planning and troop levels against an unlikely critic — Colin Powell, her predecessor at the State Department.

For the Bush administration, it was a rare instance of in-house dissenter going public.

On Rice's mind was the political breakthrough that had brought her and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to Iraq last week and cleared the way for formation of a national unity government.

Yet Powell sideswiped her by revisiting the question of whether the U.S. had a large enough force to oust Saddam Hussein and then secure the peace.

He said he advised Bush before the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003 to send more troops to Iraq, but that the administration did not follow his recommendation.

Rice, Bush's national security adviser during the run-up to the war, neither confirmed nor denied Powell's assertion. But she spent a good part of her appearances on three Sunday talk shows reaching into the past to defend the White House, which is trying to highlight the positive to a public increasingly skeptical in this election year of the president's conduct of the war and concerned about the large U.S. military presence.

"I don't remember specifically what Secretary Powell may be referring to, but I'm quite certain that there were lots of discussions about how best to fulfill the mission that we went into Iraq," Rice said.

"And I have no doubt that all of this was taken into consideration. But that when it came down to it, the president listens to his military advisers who were to execute the plan," she told CNN's "Late Edition."

Powell, in an interview broadcast Sunday in London, said he gave the advice to now retired Gen. Tommy Franks, who developed and executed the Iraq invasion plan, and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld while the president was present.

"I made the case to General Franks and Secretary Rumsfeld before the presi-

dent that I was not sure we had enough troops," Powell said in an interview on Britain's ITV television. "The case was made, it was listened to, it was considered. ... A judgment was made by those responsible that the troop strength was adequate."

In an interview with *AARP The Magazine* released Sunday, Powell did not say what advice he gave Bush about whether to go to war. Known to be less hawkish than Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney and some other presidential advisers, Powell implied he had been more cautious.

"The decisions that were made were not made by me or Mr. Cheney or Rumsfeld. They were made by the president of the United States," he said.

"And my responsibility was to tell him what I thought. And if others were going in at different times and telling him different things, it was his decision to decide whether he wanted to listen to that person or somebody else."

Rice said Bush "listened to the advice of his advisers and ultimately, he listened to the advice of his commanders, the people who actually had to execute the war plan. And he listened to them several times," she told ABC's

"This Week."

"When the war plan was put together, it was put together, also, with consideration of what would happen after Saddam Hussein was actually overthrown," Rice said.

In January, Pentagon officials acknowledged that Paul Bremer, the senior U.S. official in Iraq during the first year of the war, told Rumsfeld in May 2004 that a far larger number of U.S. troops were needed to effectively fight the insurgency, but his advice was rejected.

Bremer said his memo to Rumsfeld suggested half a million troops were needed — more than three times the number there at the time.

"There will be time to go back and look at those days of the war and, after the war, to examine what went right and what went wrong," Rice said on CBS' "Face the Nation."

"But the goal and the purpose now is to make certain that we take advantage of what is now a very good movement forward on the political front to help this Iraqi government," she said.

Powell was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the 1991 Gulf War and is known for his belief in deploying decisive force with a clear exit strategy in any type

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record profits by oil thieves, and the Resident's answers: "It's hard work," and "We are addicted to oil," and "We're fighting a war on terror."

To put us in a state of euphoria, the Resident wants to save a few barrels of oil by not adding to the reserves, and his crew wants to give us a measly \$100 to "ease the burden" of high gas prices; while the head of Exxon gets \$400 million. What compassion!

Some 2,394 young people have been killed in Iraq, and the Resident has the nerve to say they did not die in vain. How can that be true when they died for a lie? And to justify those deaths, our Resident says we must stay in Iraq and allow more soldiers to be killed. The Resident and his crew must be planning to have vacation homes in Iraq, and that's why they are spending so much money there. Oh yes, and they don't like their future neighbor, Iran; so let the gentrification begin.

Using the same argument that got us into Iraq, they are now making every effort to justify going into Iran. The Resident doesn't want Iranians to have "nuculer" capability nor even "nucule" know-how. It's all right for India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel to have them, however. Maybe this country

should be the ones banned from having these weapons. We are the only one to have ever used them, and are now threatening to use them on Iran.

Liars, liars, all of them. They have taken this world to a new low and have presided over five and a half years of chaos, confusion, charades, and political comedy, that is, if you have the stomach to laugh at the Great Decider's ignorant and childlike attempts at explaining himself to the American people. We have been bushwhacked for five years, and now we will be subjected to a "Snow job" each time there is a White House press conference.

What lies (pardon the pun) ahead for us? God only knows, but in the meantime let's do something.

Gas prices? Select two or three local companies and do not support them, especially Exxon. Iraq? Do not vote for anyone in May or November who has even a hint of a connection with the Resident. New Orleans? Help. Iran? Pray. The Resident? Evict him, and send him copies of Revelation 21:8, and highlight the part about liars.

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