

Mayor Nagin a political cross-dresser

By George E. Curry
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En route to becoming re-elected mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin proved that he is the consummate political cross-dresser. In his first run in 2002, Nagin won with more than 80 percent of the White vote and only 40 percent of the Black vote. This time, he won with about 80 percent of the Black vote and only 20 percent of the White vote.

That's quite an accomplishment. And if he were going to win, Nagin had no choice except to switch political bases after his White supporters abandoned him in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

In his first four years in City Hall, the former cable TV executive earned low marks from African-Americans. He was such a disappointment that the pastor of Greater St. Stephen's Full Gospel Baptist Church, Bishop Paul Morton — who once described Nagin as "a White man in Black skin" — and the *Louisiana Weekly*, a Black newspaper, endorsed a White challenger, Mitch Landrieu.

Yet, Nagin defeated Landrieu 52 percent to 48 percent.

How did he do it?

Katrina turned the tide in more ways than one. The White business establishment — the group that had persuaded the political novice to seek office — was dismayed by what they viewed as Nagin's inept handling of the hurricane crisis. As Whites grew more dis-

lusioned, Blacks admired his profane outburst, yelling for federal officials to get off their behinds and come to the aid of New Orleans.

Almost two dozen candidates ran for mayor, including three serious Whites: Landrieu, who finished second the general primary; Audubon Nature Institute CEO Ron Forman, who came in third, and fourth-place Rob Couhig, a Republican lawyer. Both Landrieu and Forman raised more political donations than the incumbent. In the primary, only 6 percent of Whites voted for Nagin. And with 62 percent of the primary ballots cast for someone other than Nagin, he knew that returning to City Hall would be an uphill struggle.

Nagin skillfully cemented his relationship with African-Americans. Billboards around the city asked residents of the majority-Black city to vote for "our" mayor. On Martin Luther King Day, he claimed that God wanted New Orleans to be a "chocolate city." Although Nagin apologized for his poor choice of words, he really didn't change his position on wanting New Orleans to be rebuilt as a majority-Black city.

In a debate I co-moderated in New Orleans, for example, I asked candidates if they favored a rebuilt New Orleans retaining its



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previous demographics. Landrieu and Forman, moonwalked, repeatedly refusing to answer the question directly. But Nagin was direct: yes, he favored the city retaining its previous composition.

Appearing before all-Black audiences, such as the national convention of the National Conference of Black Mayors in Memphis, Nagin made frequent references to "people who don't look like us."

To many of the people who look like Nagin, it wasn't about him. Rather, they didn't want the majority Black city to be governed by a White mayor for the first time in more than three decades.

Nagin had another, largely underreported factor that worked to his advantage.

The nonpartisan National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, an umbrella group that includes the National Urban League, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Lawyers Committee on Civil Rights and the Louisiana '06 Coalition, played a vital role in both the primary and runoff elections. From hosting mayoral debates in distant cities for displaced voters, to providing poll monitors and neighborhood canvassers and offering free legal assistance, Melanie Campbell's group can take credit for

helping increase the larger than expected Black turnout.

Their presence was magnified because some traditional civil rights voices were absent. All sectors of the community agreed that the lack of satellite voting sites across the country diluted the Black vote and that, along with other irregularities, constituted a violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Legal action taken to delay the election was unsuccessful. One, albeit small, segment felt that Blacks should have boycotted the "illegal" election. Others prevailed, supporting the legal challenges but insisting that Blacks had to be active participants in the elections.

African-Americans were indeed active. Black voter turnout, even in the post-Katrina era, increased from 53 percent in the primary to 55 percent for the runoff. Nagin carried 224 of the 229 precincts where at least 80 percent of the voters were not White. Similarly, Landrieu won 71 of the 80 precincts where at least 80 percent of the voters were White.

Before the balloting, Vincent Sylvain, local convener of the Louisiana '06 voting drive, said: "Whoever wins this election will know that African-American New Orleanians made their voices heard on Election Day."

Let's hope that this time around, Ray Nagin is listening.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.

Western politicians causing massive problems

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Trillions of dollars in debt, perpetual war, corruption, lying, cheating, stealing, spying, eavesdropping, penalizing the elderly, record deficits, the devalued dollar, the increasing euro, skyrocketing gold prices, record oil prices, vote tampering, purging eligible voters, criminal indictments and convictions of high ranking public officials, failed foreign policies, pain and suffering at the gas pump, New Orleans residents abandoned, nearly 2,500 young men and women killed, tens of thousands maimed, corporate cronyism, 40 million people without healthcare insurance, unaffordable life-saving prescription drugs, billions of cash unaccounted for in Iraq, impending war with Iran, and a 30 percent approval rating, are the testimony of the Resident of the White House.

I could have gone on but the list would have been too long. All of the above and more has taken place under the current administration. They have brought us a big mess from out west, and I wish there were some way we could send them back. I wish we could send Dubya back to Texas, send Cheney back to Wyoming, and Condoleezza back to Stanford. Rumsfeld? Send him anywhere.

Our first "snow job" from Press Secretary Tony Snow, had him saying, "I'm not that concerned about the polls." The First Lady says, "I don't believe those polls." She says she travels around the country and speaks to people, and they "love" her husband. What



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planet are these people living on? Who comprises the one-third that approve of the items listed in the first paragraph of this article? Who are the Black folks who support this mess? There must be at least 10 or so, right?

Let's see... We have about five Black mega-church preachers who love the ground Bush walks on; we have three Black politicians who are attached to this guy; and we have three Black administrators who support him. Oops! Claude Allen has been indicted for stealing and Alphonso Jackson is in trouble for his stupid comments regarding contracting. I guess that just leaves Condi. I suppose they don't really care about the polls, either.

The arrogance of these people increases everyday. Their lack of concern about the fact that two-thirds of the people they are supposed to be serving are dissatisfied is tantamount to doing what Cheney actually did: Giving them the finger. They couldn't care less about the so-called "American people." The saddest part is that is one-third, whoever they are, that still support this mess from the west.

Anyone who votes for someone connected to these thugs and thieves is a poor excuse for an informed voter. In case you have forgotten — and we do have short political memories, you know — these crooks commandeered the 2000 election and turned around and did the same thing in 2004. Remember: It's not the people who cast the votes that count, it's the people who count (See Clingman, Page 12)

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abuse. One does not imply the other. Joblessness is rampant in Latin America and India, but the mass of the population doesn't turn to crime.

They also didn't explain why so many young unemployed Black men have children — several of them — which they have no resources or intention to support.

And finally, they didn't explain why they murder each other at nine times the rate of White youths.

I believe there is a key reason that the authors of the study couldn't provide at least some explanations for problems young Black men face, nor could the authors explain the young men's inability to come up with effective strategies. Since the mid-1960s, social science and policy circles have rejected any explanation that invokes a group's cul-

tural attributes and its distinctive attitudes, values and predispositions, and the resulting behavior of its members. When you reject these issues, it makes it a lot easier to rely on structural factors like low incomes, poor schools, joblessness and bad housing.

In fact, the sociologists have more misconceptions about cultural influences than they do truth, which serves to explain the neglect. The idea that cultural explanations inherently blame the victim, focus on internal behavioral factors and, therefore, hold people responsible for their poverty, rather than putting the onus on their deprived environment. (The view put forth by many conservatives).

The argument is bogus; to hold someone responsible for his behavior is not to exclude any recognition of the environmental factors that may have induced the problematic be-

havior in the first place. For example, many victims of child abuse end up behaving in destructive ways; to point out the connection between their behavior and the destructive act is in no way to deny the causal role of their earlier victimization and the need for us to address it.

Likewise, a cultural explanation of Black male self-destructiveness addresses not simply the immediate connection between their attitudes and behavior and the undesired outcomes, but explores the origins and changing nature of these attitudes, perhaps over generations, in their brutalized past. It is impossible to understand the predatory sexuality and irresponsible fathering behavior of young Black men without going back deep into their collective past.

Finally, America spent \$50 billion in efforts that produced turnaround for poor Black

women. But because it's unpopular to fight for or defend a young Black man who has committed a crime or sold drugs or been in a gang, we Blacks and Whites alike aren't even thinking about developing a strategy to turn around the status of young Black men in America today.

Black folks have become as callous and unfeeling toward them as White folks. So much so that even when young Black men are shot down in the streets while they are handcuffed, no one, not our elected officials, our politicians, our community leaders, or our church leaders — no one — says anything but the ACLU. What does that say about us and whether or not we care about our own? Whatever happened to "innocent until proven guilty"? I guess it doesn't apply to the "Young, Black and Male in America, An Endangered Species."