

OUR VIEW

Writers' Block

There's a war going on in America's newsrooms and it has nothing to do with the Bush Administration bullying the *New York Times*, the editor of the *Los Angeles Times* standing up against company downsizing, massive buyouts at the *Dallas Morning News* or any of the myriad ongoing newsroom conflicts around the country. This battle is about the continuing struggle to diversify American newsrooms, so that the people who report and edit the news reflect the population who consumes the news. Therein lies this war's context: Envious as it might be, is a newsroom that looks like its readership even possible? And does a diverse newsroom automatically mean a diverse product? Or is diversity of thought a more reasonable goal? The warring camps have different answers.

What's clear, though, is that the number of minority journalists in American newsrooms isn't keeping pace with the country's rapidly changing demographics. Each year for the past 29 years, the American Society of Newspapers has conducted a census measuring newsroom diversity. In 2005, ASNE reports that the number of minority journalists in America's newsrooms grew slightly, inching up to 13.87 percent from 13.42 percent. Without the addition of 11 free daily newspapers, ASNE notes that the number of minority journalists would've fallen by 600. This is troubling in spite of recent gains by newspapers in hiring and retaining of minority journalists. And troubling because, as ASNE notes, six years after setting diversity benchmarks, newsroom diversity still lags. ASNE sought for newsrooms to be 18.55 percent minority (minorities comprise 13.87 percent); for minority interns to be 36.35 percent of the total pool (the actual number is 30.8 percent); for 16 percent of supervisors to be minority (the actual figure 11.2 percent); to reduce to 275 the number of newspapers with no minority staffers (the actual number is 377); and to have 348 newspapers reach parity with their community (the actual figure is 145.)

Whose to blame for these woeful numbers? Racist management? Lack of professional support and encouragement? Fewer minorities pursuing journalism careers? Higher wages and job security in other communications fields? It's probably a combination of all four, along with other factors. Two years ago, the Journal for Blacks in Higher Education conducted a survey of racial diversity in student newspapers at America's top 25 universities. The survey found that of 350 editors at 19 student newspapers, only nine (2.6 percent) were African-American.

"After reading the JBHE survey, Joe Ritchie, who holds the Knight Chair in Journalism at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, suggested to us that we check on the racial diversity of student newspapers at second-tier institutions that have accredited undergraduate journalism programs. Professor Ritchie speculated that we'd find 'only marginally better results.' Professor Ritchie was right on the mark," the Journal wrote. "The student newspapers at 17 universities with accredited undergraduate programs in journalism responded to our survey."

If not for ethnic-specific newspapers, journalism as a whole might be lily-white. With one, maybe two exceptions, local newsrooms are overwhelmingly devoid of color. When the mainstream newspapers do hire a minority journalist, it's rarely to cover a prime-time beat, and rarely do they stay long enough to score choice assignments. Who says this town can't be a permanent stop for an ambitious, enterprising minority journalist? It can, but management has to foster an atmosphere of support and expectation. Talk to most minority journalists who've worked here and they'll tell you that that doesn't occur. The classic refrain is that "we can't find qualified minority journalists." But where are they looking? National minority journalism groups are brimming with talent. Which brings us to the argument against newsroom diversity—yes, some people oppose it. Some look like us.

Issac J. Bailey, in an Aug. 11, column on MyrtleBeachOnline.com, says that "racially gerrymandered newsrooms are impractical and unnecessary... Why does it [diversity] matter?" Diversity matters, dear Issac, because without a diverse newsroom, you wouldn't have been able to get your point across to the masses.



Clinton not Democrats' savior

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It's astounding that New York Sen. Hillary Clinton is considered a frontrunner to capture the 2008 Democratic nomination for president. After losing year after year with weak, northern nominees, one would think that the Democratic Party would have learned its lesson by now. Evidently, it hasn't.

The only way Democrats have been able to win 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in nearly a half century has been by nominating a southerner. That's right, a Bubba. You don't have to be a rocket or social scientist to figure that out. In fact, you don't even have to be a scientist.

Look at the record: Since John F. Kennedy, a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, was elected in 1960, the only Democrats elected president have been his vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas; Jimmy Carter of Georgia and Bill Clinton of Arkansas. In the case of Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, it was technically a double-Bubba ticket, with two Southerners heading the ticket. Actually, it was more like 1.5 Bubbas; though Gore claims Tennessee as his home, he grew up in Washington, D.C. as the son of a United States senator.

Yet, Democrats seem lost when trying to pick a candidate for president. They can't find their butts with both hands, a map and an OnStar navigation system. They are



GEORGE E. CURRY

clueless and, in many instances, spineless. A poll released two weeks ago by the Pew Research Center for *The People & The Press* found that Democrats couldn't be better positioned to win back the White House and retake at least one chamber of Congress.

"Voters are expressing strong and consistent anti-Republican attitudes," the report stated. "The GOP lags well behind the Democratic Party on nearly all major issues, including the economy, Iraq, education, health care, the environment and the budget deficit. And the Republicans have lost ground in recent years even on such traditional strengths as terrorism and improving the nation's morality."

A famous Democrat, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, said: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Sen. John Kerry, another loser from Massachusetts, correctly noted that, "Now, we've got a president, and the only thing he's got to sell is fear itself."

The Bush administration may be peddling fear, but

fewer Americans are buying it.

"The Republican Party's advantage over the Democratic Party in dealing with the terrorist threat at home — which was as large as 30 points in January 2002 — has declined to nine points in the current survey," the Pew study says. "In addition, the public is increasingly skeptical that the U.S. is prevailing in the war on terrorism."

With the November general election less than two months away, Democrats received some encouraging news about the prospect of recapturing at least the U.S. House of Representatives.

"As in six previous surveys over the past 12 months, voters by a wide margin say they favor the Democratic congressional candidate in their district (50 percent to 39 percent)," Pew observed.

Of 17 major issues — such as Iraq, the economy, taxes, health care, budget deficits, employment, crime and immigration — the pub-

lic favored Democrats on 16 issues. Republicans had the edge in only one area.

"The Republican Party continues to hold a substantial lead in terms of having the 'stronger' political leaders — 43 percent say the GOP has stronger leaders, compared to 30 percent who see the Democratic Party's leaders as stronger," the poll found.

"This is a narrower margin than in April, when Republicans held a 53 percent to 26 percent edge in this area, but still stands out as one of the few Republican advantages going into the election season."

The reason Republicans are perceived as stronger leaders is because, in general, they hold strong, clearly articulated views. They expect and demand party loyalty. And if one of their members gets out of line, he or she is swiftly punished. Equally important, GOP handlers have been skillful in

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