

Connerly's anti-preferences rant old

By Marc H. Morial
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In 1996, 55 percent of California voters approved Proposition 209, a ballot initiative that bars the use of affirmative action by state-funded educational and government institutions. Its champion was Ward Connerly, an African-American businessman and former member of the University of California's Board of Regents who heads the American Civil Rights Institute. In 1998, he undertook a similar initiative, I-200, in Washington and emerged victorious with 59 percent of the vote.

Now, in 2006, he has taken his crusade against the use of affirmative action in higher education, public contracting and hiring programs, to Michigan, a state that is no stranger to such controversy.

It was in Michigan where Jennifer Gratz, an honor roll high school graduate with a 3.8 grade point average, was denied admission to the University of Michigan in 1995.

Two years later, she filed suit, charging that the university's point system that gave higher points to some applicants based on race unfairly rejected her. She took her fight all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in 2003 found the university's points system for undergraduate admissions unconstitutional. That process gave some applicants extra points for being a member of an underrepresented minority group. The high court, however, did not prohibit the school from using race in admissions decisions. In a separate decision, it let stand the school's system for graduate programs.

Gratz eventually graduated from the University of Michigan in Dearborn with a de-

gree in mathematics and ended up with a job in the software industry until she decided to become the executive director of the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, with Connerly as her mentor. Together Gratz and Connerly are attempting to persuade Michigan voters to approve having a ban on affirmative action written into the state's constitution. It is all in the name of "fairness" so say its supporters.

"This is not about me," Gratz has been quoted as saying. "Michigan has had this debate for almost 10 years now. The people of Michigan believe in fairness." But, the U.S. Supreme Court decided this debate in 2003 with its duo of historic decisions. Unlike California's Proposition 209, MCRI aims to overturn what the highest court in the nation already decided.

Proposition 209 was hardly fair. A year after it took effect, admissions of African-Americans to University of California schools took a 12 percent hit from 1997 to 1998, while overall admissions rose 5 percent. Enrollment fell nearly 20 percent. In 1995, Blacks made up 4.41 percent of the freshman class throughout the UC system, compared to 3.47 percent in 2005.

Where the effects are most evident is at the system's top-tier schools. At UC-Berkeley, admissions of Black students fell 56 percent from 1997 to 1998. Enrollment took a similar dive. In 1997, 7.84 percent of the freshman class was Black. In 2005, African-Americans made up 3.44 percent.

A similar decline in Black students at UCLA prompted university officials to adopt a "holistic" approach to admissions that allows decision-makers to consider all aspects of applicants. This came after the school discovered that only 96 Blacks — or 2 percent of the freshman class — were likely to enroll for the 2006 academic year.

Back in 1961, 134,000 Black students attended predominantly White colleges and universities around the country. Since then, there has been more than a ten-fold increase. You can't tell me that increased diversity hasn't had a positive effect on our nation — socially, politically and economically.

Just imagine what the absence of affirmative action would have meant for UCLA alum and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the city's first Latino mayor in 133 years.

At the National Urban League's 2006 conference, Villaraigosa cited affirmative action as a factor in his success. "Some people would say I snuck into UCLA through the back door. But one thing's for sure: I got out through the front door," he said in late July in Atlanta.

It is obvious that Proposition 201 has had negative effects that will continue to rear their ugly heads further down the line. And that's what supporters of such proposals as the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative should keep in mind. As for its fate in November, that is unclear. A recent poll by the Detroit News concluded that 48 percent of Michigan voters supported the ban, with 37 percent against

it and 15 percent undecided. But one by the *Detroit Free Press* in early September painted a brighter picture for the opposition: 41 percent were supporters, with 43 percent opposing it and 16 percent undecided. Despite these differing results, there is one thing for certain: MCRI's support of two years ago — sometimes up to 40 percentage points ahead of its opposition — has eroded.

Connerly's own American Civil Rights Institute has also come under fire for possible tax law violations. Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), called upon the IRS to examine Connerly's \$1 million in salary and expenses from his organization.

This is not a debate about the value of affirmative action in higher education and elsewhere in American society. That has been settled to some extent. Corporate America, the military and civil society organizations have promoted the value of diversity in keeping the nation competitive on the world stage.

It's about Ward Connerly's assault on a system that has built the minority middle-class in this country. He's pandering to the fears of a state savaged by layoffs and economic uncertainty. A win in Michigan may fuel similar efforts across the nation. But, a loss could definitely deal a deathblow to the entire Connerly empire. It'll send a sign all over the nation that affirmative action is an important way to level the playing field in U.S. society. It is time to put Connerly's efforts to subvert a very important institution into retirement along with him. It's time to give him a pay cut so he can spend more time on his golf game.

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MARC H. MORIAL

Falling for okey-doke? Please, don't vote!

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

On November 7, will you fall for the politricksters' games again? Will you believe their hypocritical speeches and be lulled to sleep by their empty promises? Will you once again be tricked by the notion that all you have to do is vote and things will be all right for you and your people? Will you continue to be the fodder from which politicians for life, political crooks and thieves, and political charlatans gain their wealth while ignoring you? Will you allow yourself to be played by the same old, worn-out refrain of, "Vote for me, and I'll set you free?" Will you be a 'sucka' for the umpteenth time in this biennial, obligatory, political, mating dance? Will you buy-in to the tired, played-out, electoral bait-and-switch charade?

I truly hope and pray you won't. And the best way to assure the politricksters will not trick you again is by not voting for them. So don't vote on November 7 and show these "smiling faces that tell lies" you will not take their shenanigans any longer. Show these disingenuous, pandering, condescending baby-kissers that you are an intelligent, informed, and rational person who has decided not to vote for them.

Don't get hung-up on the fact that you are a "life-long" Democrat or a Republican. Don't be led by a false sense of loyalty to any party. Don't feel guilty for not voting for party favorites. After all, who made them the favorites anyway? It certainly wasn't you.

We only vote on choices that have already

been made; we vote for folks who have already been selected by others. Take Bush, for instance, (to borrow a line from Henny Youngman, "Take him, please"); he was selected as the party favorite and you had to vote for him or one of the other guys.

In local races, we are "allowed" to vote for politicians who are selected by party bosses. Why are they selected? It could be to return a favor; it could be patronage; it could be cronyism, it could be nepotism; it could be collusion; it could be corruption. Whatever the reason is, we get to vote on somebody else's choice rather than someone who will do our bidding, someone who will finally get something done for Black people.

By and large, Black people play the political game just to play, not to win. We just love to feel like we have some political juice. But we always lose in this cut-throat game of chance. If we played to win, by leveraging our so-called voting power, a voting bloc that everyone says can determine the outcome of an election, we might have some juice.

Our children's future might be considered in those secret caucuses held by politricksters. We don't count because all we do is vote. So, this time, don't vote.

To show how politically weak we are, in the 2000 presidential election, one black (small 'b' intended) man had more power

than all of the Black people who voted. That black man was Clarence Thomas. Although his wife was said to be collecting applications from perspective Bush employees, Thomas failed to recuse himself, as did his god, Anton Scalia, who supposedly had two sons working as lawyers for Bush. The final 5-4 "selection" by the Supremes meant that Clarence Thomas had the power to determine who the next president would be; he picked George Bush. Who did the vast majority of Black voters pick?

Remember: "It's not the people who cast the votes that count; it's the people who count the votes that are cast."

Because the political game is obviously too sophisticated for the Black electorate, because we just can't seem to understand that politics is about self-interest, and because we don't seem to get it when it comes to our allegiance to the Dems or the Repubs, let's not vote. We are ensconced in the Democratic Party, just as we were loyal to the Republican Party 75 years ago; what have they delivered to us?

So, once again, I say, "Don't vote!" Don't vote for crooks. Don't vote for liars. Don't vote for cheaters. Don't vote for smiling faces. Don't vote for candidates who have shown their lack of regard for you by their past actions. Don't vote for incompetent sweet-talkers. Don't vote for black-skinned people who are not also Black-minded

people. Don't vote for popular people who are not interested in the Black populous. Don't vote for every-now-and-then politicians, both Black and White, who come around every now and then but mostly during election time.

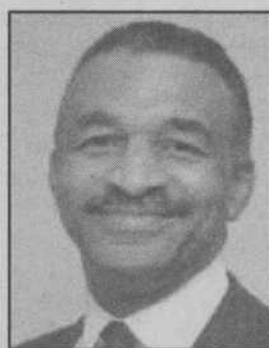
Don't vote for promises made but never kept. Don't vote for weak-kneed hypocrites. Don't vote for sellouts. Don't vote for dunces. Don't vote for lapdogs. Don't vote for smoke-and-mirror solutions. Don't vote for issues that are not in your best interests. Don't vote for nonsense. Don't vote for arrogance. Don't vote for elitists. Don't vote for racists. Don't vote for movie stars and ex-football players — at least not this year. Don't vote just to make history. Don't vote for empty suits. Don't vote for religious zealots. Don't vote for dreams rather than realities. Don't vote for hopes rather than substance. Don't vote for speeches. Don't vote for the dumb stuff.

Now that you have a long list of what not to vote for, your checklist of what to vote for should be short enough to make your voting decisions much easier.

Of course you have to do some work, be informed, do some research, and watch the count on election night (they cheat, you know).

But if you are not willing to think independently and put in a little work before and after you exercise your precious franchise, "Please, don't vote."

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