

Eye on White House—Run, Obama, run

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The specter grows that finds Senator Barack Obama being turned into a national phenomenon, drawing huge crowds of people wanting to touch the hem of his garment and catch the verbal morsels that fall from his lips wherever he goes. So massive this response has been that it sparked a political culture of speculation about his chances of running for president in 2008, especially as he travels to places like the testing ground of New Hampshire.

What people find attractive about Barack is, first, his background: a White mother and Kenyan father. Furthermore, his early residences — Hawaii, Indonesia and Kansas — all give off the scent of multi-racialism in his growing up. Then, there is his degree from Harvard Law School and his role as the first Black editor of the Harvard Law Review, traditionally suggesting high intelligence, which he used in establishing a political career in state level politics, making a sound record of accomplishment.

Finally, there are the intangibles of charisma, the earnestness in his voice, the self-deprecating, even folksy style and easily likable smile. These are qualities that fit well in a media where personal appeal is the stuff of political allure. It may even trump con-

cerns about his limited political experience.

So, Barack has attracted the curious, selling out halls in a rock-star fashion, eliciting the “run-Barack-run” chant reminiscent of when Rev. Jesse Jackson was also making up his mind about getting into the race for president in 1984. But this chant is not coming from Blacks. Therein is the difference.

Race and politics are in this equation, covered up, right now, by the hype, but positioned to bolt to the surface at the right moment. That is why the savvy Obama began his speech in New Hampshire recently saying that he was “suspicious of the hype.”

Obama is as aware of any one of the lingering fallacies of public opinion polls when it comes to assessing White support for Black candidates. When Tom Bradley, then-Black mayor of Los Angeles, barely lost a race for governor in 1982, a pattern was observed: He received his high poll numbers, but a low final vote from Whites. The same thing happened to David Dinkins when he ran for mayor of New York City, and Doug Wilder when he ran for governor of Virginia, creating a belief among analysts that the true level



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of support by White voters for Black candidates is much less than believed.

What political scientists know is that context is important in judging White support for Blacks. This was seen in the recent election where Deval Patrick was elected governor of Massachusetts, an overwhelmingly White state. But in the background, as in every state, was an explosive vote, amounting to more than 60 percent in some national polls, against the current administration for its handling of the war in Iraq. Context may also configure the politics of 2008.

In my most recent book, “Freedom Is Not Enough,” I create what I call a Jackson Model for Black candidates running for president and compare it to the campaigns of Carol Moseley Braun and Rev. Al Sharpton in the 2004 elections. But there is a distinct difference when Black candidates run from a progressive base of Blacks, women, low-income, civil-rights challenged, etc. voters — opposed to when he or she positions the campaign toward a moderate electorate. As a potential candidate already favored by the White mainstream, and running second in polls to Hillary Clinton at this writing, the prospect is great

that Obama would run toward the main body of the electorate that is to the right of Blacks.

This raises the question of where his base will be. He may well attract Black voters as a base, who will give him some issue slack because of the view that he may just be the first genuine Black candidate to win the presidency. But there is great resentment among some Blacks over the rightward drift of the Democratic Party, and, if he adds to that, he could be in trouble with Black voters.

I think that Barack Obama should run for president, especially since he doesn't lose politically. Even if he loses the nomination fight, it heightens his leadership profile in national politics and virtually ensures his Senate re-election in 2010. Right now, Obama's true political value is unknown because of the curiosity factor.

In the 2000 election, Alan Keyes, Obama's 2004 opponent for his Senate seat in Illinois, drew large crowds to hear him speak, but he attracted few votes.

Separating the entertainment factor from a political judgment may well be Obama's most trying chore in making up his mind. Of course, if he finds a creative way to use it, that will be all to the good.

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Time's up for compromise—'Bring Back Black'

By James E. Clingman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

I know I am. I am ready to connect with brothers and sisters who are unwavering and unapologetic when it comes to who they are and what their obligation is to our people. I am ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with Black folks who are unafraid and unflappable when attacked from without and from within.

I am ready to work with a new cadre of Black leaders, not new in experience but new as it relates to their current unsung status, their active youth status, and new in respect to what they have done and are doing “under the radar screen,” so to speak. There are many “new” leaders out there, and I am ready to follow them as we Bring Back Black.

The new book by W.D. Wright, “The Crisis of the Black Intellectual,” which I highly recommend you read. (Get your copy from Third World Press, Chicago.)

It contains the following passage on page 311:

“Today, there is no general Black leadership, and the Black political body is fragmented isolated, individualistic, fanciful, delusional, susceptible to posturing, and has no real sense of engaging with Black politics that are designed to help Black people in America, specifically those millions still ‘stuck at the

bottom.’

“What could interrupt this situation and force Blacks back to a general leadership and to a consciousness of Black politics would be the emergence of new and differently oriented local Black leaders. This would include some individuals drawn from those ‘stuck at the bottom.’

“There are enough Black local leaders, community organizers, and activists who could initiate this new and different leadership across the country and who could consciously and actively seek to recruit and train individuals ‘up from varied misery’ for local leadership.”

The weekend of December 8 was the first step on a journey some of us have taken before. It was the weekend when strong, dedicated, determined, and consciously Black brothers and sisters gathered to begin the Bring Back Black movement. We came together because we know W.D. Wright is correct in his assessment of Black leadership. We came together to find one another, to meet one another, to connect with one another, to support one another, and to work with one another.



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The Bring Back Black gathering comprised stalwart and resolute Black folks, some of who have been working for decades empowering our people. No need to name them; they are not looking for the spotlight. No need to number them; they are not looking for accolades. This group, as well as those who wanted to be there but could not, simply works to

overcome the psychological barriers that now prevent Black people from moving forward together, as well as individually.

They do their work quietly and without fanfare, in the same manner that Frederick Douglass described Harriet Tubman and the work she did. They work by building their own businesses, opening their own schools, and being serious about their political involvement.

They do their work by meeting payrolls from which their Black employees take care of their families. They do it by standing up and speaking out against injustice and inequity. They do it by sacrificing their time and their resources for the collective cause of Black people. That's why they came to the Bring Back Black gathering, which was held in the city Kweisi Mfume called “ground zero” — Cincinnati.

I want to state my gratitude publicly to all who came, and those who could not, for your trust and confidence in me. Yes, I made the call, but you came, and it was all of you who made our gathering a milestone in the annals of our history in this country. It was you, all of us, who have etched a new thought into the minds of our people, a thought that if nurtured and promoted, will surely take root and spring up as the movement we have searched for during the past 40 years.

In the 1960s, we had the Black Power Movement, in which our songs, our products,

our language, our clothing, our hair, our gestures, and our love of self, displayed a new thought, a new resolve, and a new dedication. What happened to it?

Those were the first stages of what could have been a most powerful movement for Black people. The remnants are still with us, but the substance of collective progressiveness and prosperity are far lacking.

Shortly after Martin Luther King's death, it seems Black folks were more susceptible to being bought off; they were more pliable and, thus, easy targets for political and social program positions and handouts. During that period, in which strong, fist-in-the-air, Black men and women capitulated to the temptations of betrayal, we heard the death knell of our movement. It was sad to see strong Black voices silenced by the lure of “jobs,” “grants,” “sponsorships” and appointments to “advisory boards.” But to many in 1960s, I suppose, it beat the alternative of being ostracized like Tommy Smith and John Carlos were, or even murdered like Fred Hampton was.

So what do we do now? We seek and follow new leadership; we take more control of our children's education; we get serious about politics by playing to win rather than just playing to play; we take better care of our bodies; we use technology and commercial media to its fullest — to tell our own story, because he who defines you, controls you; we connect with our brothers and sisters in Africa, in Haiti, Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands, and in Brazil's Bahia, and in London, and throughout the world. And finally, but importantly, we pool some of our money and invest in our own projects.

Those are the things we did at our Bring Back Black meeting. Now, I ask you again: Are you ready to Bring Back Black?

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Curry

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could leave his presidential hopes hanging by a thread. Or is that threads?”

New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd had written a column saying that Obama's “ears stick out.” When Obama saw Dowd, he teased her about her description of him, saying, “You talked about my ears. I just want to put you on notice: I'm very sensitive... I was teased relentlessly when I was a kid about my big ears.”

That joking exchange was blown out of proportion by Rush Limbaugh. He said, “.If

the guy is sensitive about his big ears, we need to give him a new name, like Dumbo, but that doesn't quite get it. You know, just calling him — calling him — that just doesn't — how about Barack Hussein Odumbo?”

Obama was named after his father, who was born in Kenya, not Kennebunkport. To focus on his name, his big ears or whether he wears a tie shows just how small-minded and vicious some opinionated talking heads can be.

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