

Apologizing for slavery doesn't suffice

By George E. Curry
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A Virginia legislator created a stir recently when said Whites living today shouldn't apologize for slavery. If subjugation of African-Americans had ended with slavery, that would be one thing. But the rancid stench of state-sponsored racism extended well into the 1960s. So, if there is to be an apology in Virginia or any other state, it should not be limited to slavery.

Consider the following, taken from the National Park Service website:

From the 1800s into the mid-1960s, there were Jim Crow laws mandating separation of the races. They were comprehensive, covering every imaginable circumstance, such as toilet facilities, railroads, buses, education, the selling of wine and beer, restaurants, housing, parks, hospital entrances, prisons, textbooks, libraries, circus tickets, theaters, reform school, fishing, lunch counters, theaters, telephone booths, cemeteries, and, above all, intermarriage [Search excerpts of Jim Crow laws at www.nps.gov].

Let's look at a few of them:

North Carolina had a law that said: "Books shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools, but shall continue

to be used by the race first using them."

Mississippi: "There shall be maintained by the governing authorities of every hospital maintained by the state for treatment of white and colored patients separate entrances for white and colored patients and visitors, and such entrances shall be used by the race only for which they are prepared."

Georgia had one governing mental hospitals that provided: "The Board of Control shall see that proper and distinct apartments are arranged for said patients, so that in no case shall Negroes and white persons be together."

So if you were mentally ill, you couldn't be together in Georgia. Louisiana even kept blind people apart. Its law stated: "The board of trustees shall... maintain a separate building... on separate ground for the admission, care, instruction, and support of all blind persons of the colored or black race."

Blacks and Whites not only couldn't interact on a normal basis while they were alive, they were even kept apart after they



GEORGE E. CURRY

had died.

A Georgia law stated, "The officer in charge shall not bury, or allow to be buried, any colored persons upon ground set apart or used for the burial of white persons."

These Jim Crow laws were rigorously enforced against children as well as adults.

Not only could the Jim Crow laws not be violated, Southern customs were also enforced.

In 1951 — three years before the Brown decision — Mark Ingram, a Black man in Yanceyville, N.C., was prosecuted for assault with intent to rape because, standing 70 feet away, he supposedly "undressed" a 17-year-old White girl with his eyes. That became known as "reckless eyeballing" [Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies*, p. 196 and Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, p.101].

We all know about Emmett Till the 14-year-old boy who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a White woman. He was brutally beaten, shot in the head, and thrown into a river.

In 1958, in Monroe, N.C., two Black boys — Fuzzy Simpson, age 7, and Hanover Thompson, age 9 — were invited to join a group of five White children, including two girls. One of the girls remembered that she had played with Hanover when his mother worked as a maid in her family's house. Overjoyed at being reunited with her old playmate,

she kissed him on the cheek.

That wasn't quite the kiss of death, but it was close. When the girl innocently told her mother, the two boys were arrested, and convicted of attempted rape. The Juvenile Court judge sentenced Fuzzy to 12 years in jail and Hanover to 14. Fortunately, there was a public outcry and President Eisenhower got the governor to intervene [Kennedy, p. 197-198].

What we collectively refer to as Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al produced three Brown decisions. The first one in 1954 outlawed "separate but equal" schools because they violated the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. The second one, handed down on May 31, 1955, held that school must be desegregated "with all deliberate speed."

Of course, "all deliberate speed" ended up being almost no speed at all.

The third Brown case was filed in U.S. District Court in Topeka on Nov. 19, 1979, by a group of parents, including Linda Brown, whose father was the lead plaintiff in the original case. They charged that Topeka still refused "to fully carry out" the 1954 court decision. An appeals court agreed with them, saying: "Topeka has not sufficiently countered the effects of both the momentum of its pre-Brown segregation and its subsequent acts in the 1960s." That order was not lifted until 1999.

Yes, there is plenty to apologize for, but it doesn't stop with slavery.

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Obama must seek Blacks

NEW YORK (AP) - Being Black doesn't necessarily mean White House hopeful Sen. Barack Obama has a lock on Black voters. In wooing a faithful Democratic constituency, Obama faces two-term New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, the party front-runner who enjoys strong support in the Black community. She also is married to former President Clinton, so wildly popular among Black voters that novelist Toni Morrison dubbed him "the first Black president" in a 1998 essay.

Obama also must contend with John Edwards, the 2004 vice presidential nominee who has won praise from Black leaders for his commitment to fighting poverty.

It was Edwards who recently addressed a high-profile New York commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr. — at the invitation of the slain civil rights leader's son.

"It will be a challenge because [Obama] will be competing against people who have relationships in the Black community," said Rev. Jesse Jackson, who ran for the Democratic presidential nomination twice in the 1980s.

Jackson, who won 13 primaries and caucuses in 1988, said he is leaning toward supporting Obama's candidacy but hasn't made an endorsement. His son, Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. of Illinois, is backing Obama.

For all his promise,

Obama is a relatively new face on the national political scene and remains unknown to many voters, including Blacks.

An Associated Press-Ipsos poll last October found Sen. Clinton with the support of 25 percent of Black voters compared with 10 percent for Obama. Former President Clinton, who is barred by term limits from running again, garnered 5 percent.

Black voters will be crucial in some of the early party primaries such as South Carolina on Jan. 29 and Alabama on Feb. 5. In 2004, Blacks made up nearly 50 percent of the Democratic primary vote in South Carolina; in Alabama, it was closer to 55 percent.

Obama also may not be the only Black candidate in the field. Civil rights activist Al Sharpton, who ran for president in 2004, says he is considering another bid, in part out of his frustration that no candidate is directly addressing urban issues.

Sharpton was in Washington recently to meet with several candidates, including Clinton, Obama, Connecticut Sen. Chris Dodd and Delaware Sen. Joe Biden, to question them on their views before deciding whether to enter the field.

David Bositis of the Joint Center for Political Studies said Obama needs to avoid the candidate mold of a Jackson or Sharpton, whose appeal did not extended much

beyond a core Black audience.

"A Black candidate who's mainly advocating for civil rights these days is not going to go anywhere in a presidential election," Bositis said. "I think he [Obama] will get substantial support from Blacks, but not all Blacks. Some Black voters are going to find him — what? Too White."

Obama was asked recently whether he might be "too White" to appeal to Black voters.

"If you look at my Black vote in my U.S. Senate race or my approval ratings back in Illinois, I feel pretty confident that once folks know who I am, then we will do just fine," he said.

Obama, 45, does not fit the familiar mode of King's generation of Black leaders. He is biracial — his White mother was from Kansas, his father from the African country Kenya — and Obama was educated at Ivy League universities.

In his first of two best-selling memoirs, "Dreams From My Father," Obama said he couldn't even get in the door at national civil rights groups when he was younger. He wrote letters to them after graduating from Columbia University but said none responded.

And while many voters have warmed to Obama's themes of political reconciliation and national unity, (See Obama, Page 14)

Walters

(Continued from Page 11)
21,000 more troops over the objections of his most knowledgeable advisers.

Within his own party, Senator John Warner of Virginia, one of the most respected leaders on defense matters, has drafted a resolution against the buildup, but Bush plows ahead. His doggedness is either a personality trait that, as indicated in another place, is symptomatic of insecurity, or he is frantically attempting to carve out of chaos a legacy of "victory," which, at this writing, appears nonexistent. Most everyone except Bush understands that "victory" in his terms is not achievable.

Nonetheless, he sounds strangely like Johnson and the Vietnam Era foreign policy apologists for that war who sought also to defend it by telling the American people that if they didn't support the war, there would be disastrous (I think he said grievous) consequences, that the Middle East would be left in chaos, etc.

But the last time I looked, chaos was just what the United States had created in Iraq and in the Middle East, refusing to reign in Israel's military operation in Lebanon, and extending their own military campaign now into

Somalia.

He also kept to the line, now discredited that 9/11 was linked to Iraq, by making the assertion that if America doesn't fight in Iraq, we will have to fight terrorism in America.

But it is also true that by fighting in Iraq, we have made it more likely that we will have to deal with terrorism in successive generations, probably more so than if we had not.

The fact that America has and will have to deal with terrorism is not a function of the situation in Iraq; it is a result of the historical consequences of one-sided, oil-centric foreign policy in the Middle East that has made us complicit in the evils of the elite leadership in those countries. To ask people to believe that if victory (by whatever definition) comes in Iraq that history will be eliminated, is rubbish of the highest sort.

Bush filled the Congressional chambers with military men; so in addition to the Joint Chiefs, there were other uniformed soldiers in the audience, all of which gave a strong military feeling to the gathering.

To me, it also gave off the whiff of inference that here was a president using sol-

diers for assets in a game of politics.

In fact, probably more than any other president, he has sought to drum up support for the troops as a proxy for support for a failing military venture.

What was missing from an African-American perspective was any mention of Katrina and the extension of benefits beyond those recently mentioned by FEMA. There was no mention of the deteriorating economic status of American workers and the linkage to poverty as Wall Street does very well indeed.

There was no mention of signing bills passed by the Democrats, such as building on the minimum wage. There was no pledge not to cut Pell Grants. We heard no mention of providing more money for stressed mothers or for childcare in the welfare reform programs.

This was a well-delivered but unmemorable speech; a feeble justification for failure given by a president trapped in the vortex of his own untruths. Nothing more, nothing less.

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