

Racial politics never surprising in elections

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Back during the enslavement of Africans in America the so-called "One Drop Rule" was invented in order to assure a continuous supply of free labor from Black people.

As ridiculous as the rule was, it shows us today how desperate the rulers of this land were, and still are, not only to maintain control, but also to keep the waters muddied when it comes to the political and social discourse.

They want to have it both ways. They want us to be "colorblind" when it comes to their ambitions, and yet they still promote and support the One Drop Rule. What's a Black person to do in this country?

The United States is the only country in the world that uses this mode of classification and in an article written by Stephan Thernstrom in April 2000, the author states, "The United States is the only country in the world in which a White woman can give birth to a Black baby, but a Black woman cannot give birth to a White baby."

Think about this and other historical issues regarding race in this country, and you will surely come away with a better understanding of what is behind the current political jousting matches.

Now that there is a glimmer of "hope" (I seem to remember that word being used in Bill Clinton's campaign, as well: "I still believe in a little town called Hope.") among Black folks that a "Black" man could be this country's next leader, we hear all kinds of racial innuendos, undertones and overtones,

and suggestions that Whites will, in the privacy of the voting booth, go for a McCain (ugh), Romney (Reagan reincarnate), or even Giuliani (the joker) over an Obama. Who knows? Maybe they would even do the same over Hillary.

Black folks are in on this game as well. We have bought into the One Drop Rule for centuries, but now we are questioning it by asking is Obama Black enough. Maybe we need to change the rule to ten drops or something more substantial, which proves just how stupid this whole issue has become.

White people are in control of this country, and they plan to keep it that way; thus, they rally around their common denominator of "White"-ness but deny us that same benefit. They reach back and grab old pre-Civil War traditions, whenever they need them, in order to change the game or keep the confusion going. I understand.

What if we were in charge? I'd like to think we would be fair and equitable in our dispensation of justice, economic benefits, and other "inalienable" rights. I'd like to think we would exercise moral and ethical behavior toward one another. But some of what I see going on among Black people, caught up in the hoopla of presidential politics, casts a shadow over the "hope" I have for a better condition among our people, no matter who wins in November.

Young men and women are still dying



JAMES CLINGMAN

every day in Iraq, and idiots like John McCain are still trying to convince us the "surge is working." And even after the recent news that the Bush Administration (which in this case includes, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Rice and Powell) told 935 lies to get us into the war in Iraq, he says we did the right thing. Huckabee, the preacher, won't even call out the "sins" of the Bush administration. Lying is a sin, isn't it?

Black folks have lost the zeal for even discussing the war anymore; we are too immersed in what we should call ourselves, arguing over whether it should "Black" or some other name.

In this country, the One Drop Rule applies, although it is stupid, it still applies. We are ensconced in who will be our next president, but yet we accept the candidates' refusal to say a single word about their plans to help Black people, while they have no problem at all stating their desires and support for the Jewish people.

Blacks will not make the progress we need to make, under any president, if we do not move from the ridiculous to the sublime — and then on to the pragmatic work of saving ourselves — before it's too late. We seem to get caught up the most mundane, diversionary, elementary issues, while other folks are busy strengthening their position even more. So, we should not be surprised at the discussions on the campaign trail these days. It's all part of the game that has always made

losers out of Black people.

Lawrence Wright wrote an article, "One Drop of Blood," published by *The New Yorker* in 1994.

I leave you with an excerpt:

"Is it any accident that racial and ethnic categories should come under attack now, when being a member of a minority group brings certain advantages? The White colonizers of North America conquered the indigenous people, imported African slaves, brought in Asians as laborers and then excluded them with prejudicial immigration laws, and appropriated Mexican land and the people who were living on it.

"In short, the non-White population of America has historically been subjugated and treated as second-class citizens by the White majority. It is to redress the social and economic inequalities of our history that we have civil-rights laws and affirmative-action plans in the first place.

"Advocates of various racial and ethnic groups point out that many of the people now calling for a race-blind society are political conservatives who may have an interest in undermining the advancement of non-Whites in our society. Suddenly, the conservatives have adopted the language of integration, it seems, and the left-leaning racial-identity advocates have adopted the language of separatism. It amounts to a polar reversal of political rhetoric." The more things "change," the more they stay the same.

James Clingman is an educator and authors a Black economic empowerment book series.

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day: End finger pointing

By Gil Robertson IV
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Dear Black America:

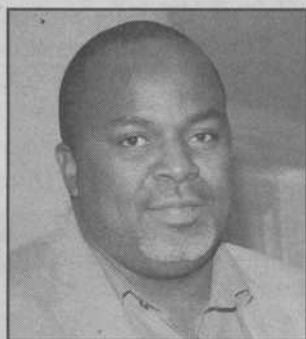
My name is Gil Robertson IV, editor of the best-selling, landmark anthology, "Not in My Family: AIDS in the African American Community."

Up until the release of the book, I spent over a decade as an A&E journalist reporting on popular trends, events and personalities that populate the entertainment industry. However, in the summer of 2005, I became committed to writing about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which by then had already gained a solid foothold within the African-American community, including my own family with my brother living with the disease.

So, I decided to write a book that would

highlight my family's story and that I hoped would offer a measure of support and comfort to other families living in the shadows of this disease. However, as my idea developed, it quickly evolved to include other stories, resulting in 58 essays from a wide-cross section of people sharing how HIV/AIDS has influenced and reshaped their lives, and an info website, NotInMyFamily.com.

"Not in My Family" was released on World AIDS Day, and since its publication, I have toured America extensively connecting with members of the Black community on a



GIL ROBERTSON IV

variety of different issues involved with this disease. Away from wearing red-ribbons, never-ending conferences and stogy speeches, my experience with this book created an opportunity for me to engage with Black people — up close, personal and for real about how we begin as a community to effectively deal with this issue.

A year later, I have come away with a lot of confidence about how deeply African-American's care for their brethren. The problem is that a vast majority in the Black community are confused and unsure about what they can do. Faced with overwhelming challenges coming from all directions has left our community beleaguered and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and numerous other social ills.

So what do we do about HIV/AIDS?

Well for starters, African-Americans need to get honest and real about the fact that as sexual animals, we're all susceptible to the disease.

The finger pointing must end. We also must do away with our fear, prejudice and denial over sex and sexuality, and accept the fact that this is not a "gay disease." Homosexuals were the most visible and vocal community affected by this disease, but this disease has never been exclusive to any one group of people.

The African-American community must drop all the falsehoods and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS.

Many of us thought this disease would never touch our population in a significant

way, but this disease is here, and it's not going anywhere until we change our behavior and attitudes about this disease.

African-Americans must develop the will and confidence to demand a change from the U.S. government, business community and medical institutions in terms of an aggressive response to this crisis.

As citizens of a nation with the assets to land a man on the moon and finance wars on terror, African-Americans should insist on nothing less than full engagement in the federal support to solving the HIV/AIDS in Black communities.

African-Americans must be mindful of their contributions to America and the rest of the world. We must also remember that we are the descendants of people who had the strength and resiliency to overcome the Middle Passage, slavery and racial discrimination.

In other words, we're not asking for anything, but simply demanding to get the best support and treatment that we deserve. On our own, it's time for African-Americans to accept responsibility and become accountable for how HIV/AIDS has spread within our communities.

We must move beyond having conversations about this problem and get busy with implementing the actual work for removing this disease out of our space.

After connecting with so many of you during the past year, I know that the Black community has what it takes to get things done and that, soon, HIV/AIDS will be nothing but a bad, bad dream.

Until then, remember National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is Feb 7.

Curry

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one other than Hillary Clinton. In New Hampshire, 61 percent voted "ABC" — Anybody but Clinton. Almost half of those participating in the Nevada caucuses — 49 percent — voted for Clinton's opponents. In Michigan, where Clinton was virtually unopposed, she lost 45 percent of the vote. And in South Carolina, 83 percent of the voters supported Clinton's opponents.

When you look at the Black vote, which is the most loyal bloc in the party, Hillary Clinton's showing is even more unimpressive. In Michigan, where the Democratic Party asked presidential candidates not to compete because the state moved up its contest over the objection of party officials, 69 percent of African-Americans voted for an

uncommitted slate rather than vote for Clinton. In South Carolina, where Bill Clinton was used extensively, 80 percent of African-Americans rejected Hillary Clinton.

Even Toni Morrison has now endorsed Obama, saying, "There have been a few prescient leaders in our past, but you are the man for this time."

Former Clinton adviser Dick Morris speculates that the Clinton attack on Obama in South Carolina was a deliberate ploy to inject race into the contest, hoping it will create a White backlash against Obama on Feb. 5, when voters go the polls in 22 states.

If true, that's as bad as any Republican dirty trick.

George E. Curry is a keynote speaker, moderator and media coach.