

# Black press decry presidential debate diversity

*By Eric Mayes*  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
 PHILADELPHIA (NNPA) — “I think that considering the fact the debate is in Philadelphia, it’s a bit disingenuous,” said Denise Clay, a vice-chair for the Media Watch Committee for the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists.

“You’re in a city that is majority minority. I guess this is ABC’s show and they wanted their people. But couldn’t they find anyone?” Only a week before the Pennsylvania Primary, Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. Hillary Clinton were scheduled to participate in the event, which was held at 8 p.m. Wednesday at the National Constitution Center.

It was moderated by the anchor of ABC’s “World News,” Charlie Gibson and the network’s Washington

bureau chief George Stephanopoulos. ABC said the two men were chosen to moderate the event because of their experience in the political arena.

“They certainly have the resumes for something like this,” said ABC spokeswoman Natalie Raabe.

Clay said the network’s choice deprived voters of a broader voice.

She immediately suggested ABC anchor Diane Sawyer or former ABC correspondent Michelle Martin.

“There are too many journalists of color, too many women, too many people who could actually be a voice,” she said.

“It’s a shame that in the year 2008, journalists of color are still fighting to get a seat at the table,” Barbara Ciara, president of the National Association of Black

Journalists agreed. “Based on the rich diversity that Philadelphia has among its population, it’s reasonable to expect that would be considered when selecting a moderator,” she said.

Clay did not hold ABC entirely responsible.

The candidates have tremendous influence in how the debates are conducted and should have asked that the network’s moderators represent its audience, she said.

“I kind of hold Clinton and Obama responsible,

too,” Clay said. “If the candidates don’t demand anything [debate hosts] will do what they want.”

The lack of diversity in the press corps is larger than this one debate, she added.

It has affected coverage of the entire campaign and conversations about the presidential race.

Rather than focus on issues, much of the media coverage surrounding the campaign has centered on issues Clay considered tangents rather than those faced by the majority of voters.

“If there is no diversity in

the press corps it affects the coverage,” she said.

Ciara agreed. “I don’t think all White people think alike, nor do I think all Black people think alike,” she said.

“But the fact that there are so few African Americans in the journalism mix during this election cycle profoundly affects the vision, message and perspective that you see, hear and read in the media.”

“The issues are getting missed,” continued Clay. “There is so much that needs to be talked about, so much

that needs to be thoroughly fleshed out. Lets focus less on the historic horseshoe and talk about the issues.”

She went on to suggest that the lack of diversity and the coverage it might generate could be the cause of shrinking network news audiences who don’t see themselves reflected on their television screens.

She concludes, “At some point the evening news is going to have to get over ‘the voice of God White man attitude.’”

*Eric Mayes writes for the Philadelphia Tribune.*

## Court cites race in death verdict

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court threw out a death sentence and murder conviction because a Louisiana prosecutor kept Blacks off the jury in a trial he called his “O.J. Simpson case.”

By a 7-2 vote, the justices said state prosecutor Jim Williams improperly excluded Blacks from the jury that convicted Allen Snyder of killing his estranged wife’s companion. Snyder is Black and the jurors were White.

Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the majority, said the trial judge should have blocked Williams from striking a Black juror. Alito’s opinion made no mention of Simpson.

Justices Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia dissented. Thomas said he would not “second-guess” the judge.

During jury selection in the trial, Williams disqualified all five Blacks in the pool of prospective jurors. The Supreme Court ruled in 1986 that prosecutors may not exclude people from a jury solely because of their race. The court already had sent Snyder’s case back to the Louisiana courts following a ruling in 2005 that bolstered the prohibition on race bias in jury selection.

The prosecutor’s explanation for striking a prospective Black juror was “suspicious,” said Alito. The prospective juror’s supervisor said he did not think a schedule conflict between the upcoming trial and the prospective juror’s work would be a problem.

In contrast, the prosecutor accepted White jurors who disclosed conflicting obligations “that appear to have been at least as serious as” the prospective Black juror who was excused, Alito wrote.

The trial took place in August 1996, less than a year after Simpson was acquitted of killing his ex-wife and a male friend of hers. Leading up to the trial, Williams made repeated public references to the Snyder case as his “O.J. Simpson case.”

Snyder was convicted of first-degree murder in Jefferson Parish, just outside New Orleans. He was found guilty of repeatedly slashing his estranged wife, Mary Snyder, and a man, Harold Wilson, with a knife when he found them in a car outside her mother’s home in August 1995. His wife survived, but Wilson died.

Adding to the Simpson comparison, Snyder told police just before his arrest that he was suicidal. Simpson, *(See Conviction, Page 11)*

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