

Tome: Using race card stacks deck vs. user

The Race Card: How Bluffing About Bias Makes Race Relations Worse

By Richard Thompson Ford; Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Hardcover; \$26.00; 400 pages.

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By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

"Almost all Americans agree that racism is wrong... But a lot of people also worry that the charge of racism can be abused. We can all think of examples: Tawana Brawley... Clarence Thomas... and, of course, there's O.J. Simpson... Ever since the acquittal of O.J., the idea that race is a 'card' to be played for selfish advantage has become commonplace...

'The Race Card' will examine the prevalence of dubious and questionable accusations of racism and other types of bias... The term 'racism' is in a state of crisis... Self-serving individuals, rabblers, and political hacks use accusations of racism, sexism, homophobia and other types of 'bias' tactically, to advance their own ends [while] people of goodwill may make sincere claims that strike others as obviously wrongheaded." — Excerpted from the Introduction (pages 6-7, and 36)

Was it fair for a billionaire

like Oprah Winfrey to cry racism when an upscale store refused her admittance, unaware that she was a celebrity? How about Michael Jackson's undergoing a series of cosmetic surgery procedures to turn himself White only to later conveniently reclaim his Blackness when he wanted to allege that his record company had treated him like a slave?

Clarence Thomas successfully squelched further inquiry into his fitness for the Supreme Court during his confirmation hearings by publicly alleging that the pro-

ceedings amounted to little more than a "high-tech lynching." And hip-hop mogul Jay-Z called for a Black boycott of a pricey brand of champagne after an executive with the company complained about having their product associated with gangsta rap.

According to Richard Thompson Ford, author of "The Race Card: How Bluffing About Bias Makes Race Relations Worse," these incidents suggest that some relatively well-to-do and well-connected African-Americans might be willing to

make inappropriate accusations of prejudice for purely selfish reasons. The problem is that in the process they are subverting the honorable ideals of the Civil Rights Movement to eradicate Jim Crow segregation and the more egregious evidence of the vestiges of slavery in society.

The author laments that such manipulation has backfired, because "it distracts attention from larger social injustices" and "encourages vindictiveness and provokes defensiveness when open-mindedness and sympathy are needed." He goes on to

say that Whites were disheartened to observe African-Americans celebrating the O.J. verdict, which they saw as "a frightening indication that many Blacks would rejoice in retaliatory injustices."

For Whites often feel they are themselves the victims of a demeaning racial stereotype that would have everyone believe they are "plain vanilla" and "dull milquetoasts" whose virtues can only be narrowly assessed "by grades and test scores." Regardless of whether White men can't

jump or have rhythm, leveling charges of either racism or reverse-racism for unmerited advantage are more likely to engender responses of cynicism than empathy nowadays.

Ford concludes that opportunists who resort to the tactic of playing the race card "are the enemies of truth, social harmony, and social justice." His solution? "For all decent and honest people" to join in condemning any such perpetrators. Certainly, food for thought at the dawn of what has been dubbed by some a post-racial age.

Ludacris returns to alma mater in Atlanta

ATLANTA (AP) — Ludacris returned to his alma mater, stepped into a gymnasium — and saw a mural that included his likeness.

"I've always wanted a street named after me, but this is better," the 30-year-old rapper said of the mural, which includes his face overlooking the words "Gym of Dreams."

He was welcomed back to Banneker High School in south Atlanta to participate in a crusade against violence. He spoke at a ceremony Monday honoring a project by students who stuffed a box with more than 1,000 anonymous

"When people say, 'Never forget where you come from,' this is what they mean. I'm just trying to use my celebrity status to help the kids understand that they can make it."

— Ludacris

letters on the topics of gang violence and rape into a Black coffin in early February.

The small gym was named for Christopher Bridges, Ludacris' real name. He also received a red-and-white No. 69 football jersey. He graduated from the school

in 1996.

"I know a lot of us come from hard times, but it's extremely important that you use your street knowledge and book knowledge to get to where you need to be," he told a crowd of about 2,000.

Principal Robert L. Williams said his predecessor

hadn't let Ludacris come to the school "as his rap personality to tell his testimony of success. The person before me believed students were too rowdy for him to come," he said. "But I have a different view, because he'll be able to change someone's mindset for the good."

Ludacris and R&B singer Monica planted two trees on the school's front lawn.

"This is a way to show them how to stay on track," Monica said. "There's a lot of peer pressure out there in the world. But the tree symbolizes a fresh start."

Ludacris and school offi-

cialists were persuaded to work together by Malika James, who headed the event along with Men of Destiny, a local mentorship program. James is producing a TV documentary series, "Behind the Mic," from the event.

"When people say, 'Never forget where you come from,' this is what they mean," Ludacris said. "I'm just trying to use my celebrity status to help the kids understand that they can make it."

Ludacris won a Grammy for best rap album for "Release Therapy" and best rap song for "Money Maker."

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