

FORUM

Friends and strangers having fun



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

"You cannot travel within and stand still without."
- James Lane Allen

My wife and I decided to change our weekend routine to include taking in a college basketball game. Usually, the week ends with the two of us meeting at home after work and then back out for a bite to eat at one of our favorite restaurants. This weekend would be dinner and a game.

The most exciting game of the night proved not to be the one we paid to see. It was a blowout. It was the impromptu game that started with three boys, a basketball and an empty basketball court. Before halftime

was over and the teams resumed play, the fun the three boys were having attracted three more boys in the stands to join them and the game was on.

It was the unofficial halftime entertainment. They grabbed my attention as I smiled, wishing I were a happy-go-lucky kid again. A two-day tournament, the C.E. "Bighouse" Gaines Classic, was scheduled on the campus of Winston Salem State University (WSSU). The tournament is named after legendary coach "Bighouse" Gaines - 828 wins in 47 years - who watched the games from the top of the bleachers in the gym that he built.

Since students had not returned from their holiday break, those in attendance were primarily the faithful supporters, including Chancellor Harold Martin, who sat with his family right behind the team bench, cheering them on.

It was a good crowd.

We arrived right after the tip-off of the second game featuring the home team, the Rams of WSSU against Ferris State, from Grand Rapids, Mich. It was a close game for a few minutes and then the Rams started to walk away with the game. An almost 10-point lead would eventually approach 40.

We were about to leave midway through the second half. The game was so far out of reach and no longer interesting. Fortunately, that unanticipated surprise during halftime made the night. It should have made the evening sports news highlight reel.

It started out as a one-on-one game between two boys, one white, and one black. They are friends, Philip, the son of the head coach at WSSU, and his buddy, Steven. Actually there were three boys, but the third one seemed to be trying to steal the ball whenever he could from the other two. While fans were getting drinks, popcorn and

candy from the concession stands, the three boys were enjoying free control of the court.

They were running back and forth, up and down the court with enthusiasm and endless energy. No timeouts for them. They had to make the most of this opportunity. I remember those days - long ago now. "Usually they are eating more than anything else," said Rick Duckett, the head basketball coach at the school. The two friends are ball boys and "don't miss a game," he said.

Before too long, another little boy joined in and was running full speed with the big boys. He was pint size and took about 10 steps to the taller boys' three or four and had to stop and set up for his shot. He pushed hard with two hands and almost made it. The fans were with him and wanted him to make it. When he

See Alston on A10

Democrats prepare to bloody Ashcroft



Armstrong Williams
Guest Columnist

I was zigzagging through the sea of faces at the first Million Family March, laughing and talking, when a voice collided with me.

"Hey! Armstrong my brother, glad to see you could make it."

I turned. Wading through the crowd was Sen. John Ashcroft, who proceeded to envelop me in a great, big bear hug. We proceeded to chat away, discussing how to build and affirm family values.

In the years since, I have remained deeply sensitive to the senator's efforts in this regard. That's why it pains me to see the Democrats circling the wagons around his recent nomination as attorney general.

You see, Ashcroft - by all accounts a man of honor and integrity - is staunchly opposed to abortion and affirmative action. In short, the Democrats do not see themselves reflected back in Ashcroft. Therefore, they intend to bloody him during the upcoming

nomination proceedings.

Already, battle lines have been drawn, with particular attention being paid to the fact that Ashcroft opposed President Clinton's nomination of Ronnie White - the first black member of the Missouri Supreme Court - for a federal judgeship last year.

Now it's pay-back time. Along the way, the Democrats hope to keep blacks sucking on this bitter pill of racism. As the liberals learned long ago, playing the race card pulls black voters out to the voting booths. Currently, they're keeping the wounds open by turning Ashcroft into a white Justice Thomas.

Recent salvos are all pretty much telling the same story. Each does a quick denouncement of Ashcroft's conservative views, then savages the senator for blocking White's nomination, and concludes by implying, at best, that Ashcroft's staunchly conservative positions will interfere with his ability to enforce laws. At worst, they suggest that he is a racist.

For example, a recent New York Times editorial by Bob Herbert claims that "(Ashcroft had) no legitimate reasons to oppose Justice White's confirmation by the Senate."

Herbert then implies that the decision was racially motivated.

In fact, concern over White's criminal record was pervasive enough to warrant opposition from his home state senators, the national sheriff's association and the Missouri law enforcement community. For obvious reasons, Herbert failed to mention any of these rousing points. Nor, for that matter, have the high priests of blackness mentioned that as governor of Missouri, Ashcroft appointed the first black judge to the Kansas City State Court of Appeals.

Such omissions reflect the not-so-subtle ways that Democrats manipulate racial fears in this country. Like popcorn to pigeons, the Democrats are readying to toss out charges of racism as a means of getting back at Ashcroft for opposing them. In doing so, they trivialize the very issue they claim to be defending.

Even more hackneyed are the criticisms that some extreme feminist groups are launching against Ashcroft. Clearly, his opposition to abortion has the feminists on the defensive.

"(Ashcroft is) a real danger to women's rights," snarled feminist Kate Michelman. The gist of her

criticism, near as I can figure, is, by God, he doesn't believe in murdering fetuses.

In short, the feminists are pumping their fists at Ashcroft's nomination because he ascribes to a different core value system and maintains different social circles than they do. In their egotism, they quiver at the notion of a social conservative presiding so close to the law that binds them.

None of which, incidentally, has anything to do with Ashcroft's duties as attorney general. As Ashcroft has plainly stated in his own writings, the law is not a philosophy and the attorney general is not a social engineer. Just because Ashcroft is a conservative, there is no reason to believe that he will remake the law in his own image.

Get it? Ashcroft's opponents are on the warpath not because he is a threat to our civil liberties (he is not), but because he is a different sort of person than they are.

Amid the corruption and privilege that characterized the Clinton/Reno Justice Department, this might not be such a bad thing.

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Jesse Helms vs. Jim Wynn, round 2



Val Atkinson
Jones Street

Judge James A. Wynn Jr. has been renominated for a seat on the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. As one of Bill Clinton's final acts before the conclusion of his presidency, he has once again nominated Wynn. Sen. Jesse Helms thwarted Wynn's previous nomination. Helms has claimed that his decision has nothing to do with race and that his opposition to Wynn's appointment had to do with the number of judges already on the 4th Circuit.

Before Roger Gregory's recess appointment, the 4th Circuit was five judges short of its capacity - but Senator "No" thinks that four or five judges short is actually too many judges. In addition to the 4th Circuit being five seats

short, there were no African Americans or North Carolinians on the court.

According to the latest census data, North Carolina has more than 8 million citizens, is the 11th largest state, has 13 representatives and has the largest number of African Americans of any of the states in the 4th Circuit - but no representation from African Americans in North Carolina. I wonder if Helms would think there's already enough judges on the 4th Circuit if the court were all black with no representation from North Carolina.

Wynn is a moderate Democrat with impeccable credentials, a spotless record of service in the public sector as well as the private sector and his integrity is unquestionable. So why would such a well qualified man of high integrity be denied a vacant seat on a court which obviously could use his expertise, knowledge of N.C. law and minority sensitivity? Helms says it has nothing to do with race. I can't read Helms'

mind so I don't know if his decision was based on race or not. I do, however, think the senator and his supporters know that Wynn is not a right-wing conservative. And the lack of those credentials is what's keeping him off the court as much if not more so than his race is.

Helms has told Wynn that his decision was not based on race and Wynn has taken the senator at his word. Wynn has to agree with Helms - at least publicly. Wynn is smart enough to know that you don't publicly call a guy a racist and then expect him to support your nomination. And for that matter, I don't think any of the rest of us is calling Helms a racist. A better I.D. might be that his decision on Wynn's nomination reflects his view of politics, which sometimes tends to be tempered by his cultural affiliation. But be that as it may, the bottom line is that Wynn still needs Helms' support to get a seat on the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals.

I hope that round 2 is the final round and that the court finally has some representation from its most populous state, and that representation should be Wynn.

And here's my surprise: I have a sneaky suspicion that Helms just might give in this time. Don't ask me why; I just feel that way. Stay tuned!

Val Atkinson's background: retired military (20 years in the U.S. Army); business officer, N.C. School of the Arts; Office of State Personnel; acting assistant secretary, N.C. Department of Cultural Resources; assistant director, N.C. DMV; radio talk show host, Foxy 107/104 since 1989; columnist (N.C. African-American newspapers) since 1998; B.A. degree, psychology, Columbia College; M.A. degree, business management, Central Michigan University; M.P.A. degree, public administration, N.C. Central University. Atkinson can be reached at Atkinson@Africana.com.

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