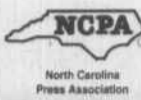


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

The Choice for African-American News

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President Bush and Trent Lott celebrate Sen. Strom Thurmond's recent 100th birthday in Washington.

Lott and racism

Trying to distance himself in 1999 from the right-wing Council of Conservative Citizens, Sen. Trent Lott wrote that he could never support a group that denigrates people "because of their race or religion." He added, "I grew up in a home where you didn't treat people that way, and you didn't stand with anyone foolish or cruel enough to do so."

Lott lied then in his letter to the Anti-Defamation League and he lied last week and again this week as he moved quickly from being the Senate majority leader-in-waiting to a serial apologist trying to rationalize his enthusiastic support for Strom Thurmond's segregationist campaign for president in 1948.

At a celebration of Thurmond's 100th birthday, Lott said: "We voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years."

He later claimed that he got caught up in the moment and apologized for "a poor choice of words." Far from being caught up in a celebratory frenzy, the Clarion-Ledger newspaper in Jackson, Miss., disclosed that Lott had used almost identical language at a Nov. 2, 1980, rally with Thurmond. At the time, Lott said in Jackson, "If we had elected this man 30 years ago, we wouldn't be in the mess we are today."

A review of Lott's record shows that not only has he actively opposed civil rights throughout most of his life, he and his family have been closely associated with white supremacy groups and ideas as recently as three years ago.

Let's begin with his family. After violence erupted over James Meredith's desegregation of the University of Mississippi in 1962, some calmer white voices in Mississippi urged moderation. For example, Ira Harkey Jr., editor of the now-defunct Pascagoula Chronicle, published editorials opposing mob violence and Gov. Ross Barnett's rabid opposition to desegregation.

Harkey's call for nonviolence was met with violence; the windows of his newspaper office were shot out by someone who obviously didn't share his views. A while later, Harkey received a letter from a woman who told him that if he didn't publish her letter it would prove "you are truly an integrationist and I hope you not only get a hole through your office door but through your stupid head."

The letter was signed Iona W. Lott - Trent's mother.

Harkey told a New York Times reporter, "I called her, asked if she'd sent it to me, and

she said she certainly had sent it to me, and she meant every word."

Trent Lott was particularly close to one of his uncles, Arnie Watson. A die-hard segregationist even into his 90s, Watson headed the Carroll County, Miss., chapter of the White Citizens Councils and was elected to the board of its successor white supremacy organization, the Council of Conservative Citizens.

So Lott, who graduated from an all-white high school in Pascagoula, was walking in familiar territory when as a student at Old Miss, he opposed efforts to desegregate the university and his fraternity, Sigma Nu. In a 1997 interview with Time magazine, he acknowledged, "Yes, you could say that I favored segregation then."

After graduation from law school, Lott began working for Rep. William L. Colmer, an arch-segregationist from Mississippi. When he retired, Lott succeeded him in 1972. His first piece of legislation was an anti-busing bill.

Not all segregationists remained chained to the past. Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas probably did more to advance the causes of African-Americans than any other president. Hugo Black, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan, threw off his white sheets and became one of the most liberal members of the U.S. Supreme Court.

But Trent Lott, who receives an F each year on the NAACP's civil rights report card, has shown no such growth.

Lott - who said in 1998 that "sometimes I feel closer to (President) of the Confederacy) Jefferson Davis than any other man in America" - was the only senator to vote against the confirmation of Roger Gregory, the first African-American judge ever seated on the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Lott voted against extension of the Voting Rights Act in 1982, and the following year, he opposed making Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday a federal holiday. Even Thurmond, the former Dixiecrat, supported all three measures.

As a congressman, Lott went so far as to file a Supreme Court friend-of-the-court brief in 1981 in support of Bob Jones University, hoping to provide tax-exempt status to an institution that prohibited interracial dating.

As Jesse Jackson says of Lott, "He is supposed to be Senate majority leader for all Americans, but once again has shown he is interested only in Confederates."

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.



Don't get Scrooged: holiday shopping tips

From Attorney General Roy Cooper

As we cherish our loved ones and give thanks for all that we have during this holiday season, it's important to make sure our gift-giving dollars are well spent. For many consumers, a trip to the store is a holiday tradition. Rather than fight the crowds, some holiday shoppers prefer to browse online or order by mail from catalogs. Regardless of where you go in search of gifts, keep these tips in mind to keep from feeling more like Scrooge than Santa:

- Learn about refund and return policies. Some companies may accept returned merchandise, but they are not required to do so by law. Many retailers will offer you store credit instead of a cash refund. Also, ask if the store charges a "restocking fee" for returned merchandise. If your purchase came by mail, you might have to pay postage to return it.
- Buy from established retailers. A well-established

store is more likely to still be in business if you need to return a gift or make an exchange. This is also important if you give gift certificates or gift cards. With catalogs and Web sites, it is also wise to stick with familiar names. Beware of unsolicited telephone calls, e-mails or catalogs from vendors you've never heard of. You can check up on a company by calling my office at (919) 716-6000 or contacting your local Better Business Bureau.

- Consider paying by credit card to improve your chances of getting a refund if the retailer goes out of business. If the gift certificate you purchased has not yet been used and the company has closed its doors, you may be able to dispute the charge if you paid by credit card. And if you order a gift that never arrives, you'll be able to dispute the charge. Also, if your credit card is stolen or used by an unauthorized person, federal law limits your liability to \$50. Some credit card companies offer additional protections for buyers.
- Ask when your order will arrive. Internet and catalog shoppers alike are protected

by the Federal Mail Order Rule. By law, a company is required to ship your order within the time stated in its catalog or on its Web site. If they don't give you a timeline, they have 30 days to ship your purchase once they have received your order. If the seller can't ship the item within that time, they must notify you and give you a chance to cancel the order for a full refund.

- Hang on to receipts. Save your receipts in case the gifts you bought need to be returned or exchanged. If you buy online, print pages that show what you have purchased. When ordering by mail or telephone, be sure to ask the company to send you an invoice or receipt. Some retailers can provide you with a gift receipt that makes it easier for the gift opener to return that sweater if it doesn't fit or isn't the right color.
- Guard your privacy. You keep your wallet in a safe place when you shop at local stores. It is just as important to keep an eye on personal information when you shop on the Web or by mail order. Before you provide any personal information, find out

about the company's privacy policy. Also, make sure the company uses a secure server that will protect any personal information in your order.

An unbroken key or padlock symbol at the bottom of the browser window means you're shopping on a secure site. If the business doesn't have a policy or you aren't comfortable with the way they may use your personal information, take your business elsewhere.

- Protect your identity. Never give out your Social Security, driver's license or bank account numbers when someone calls you on the phone. While a credit card can be a great way to order by phone or Internet, you should never give out your credit card number to an unknown telemarketer.

And finally, to avoid starting the new year in debt, buy only what you can afford.

Each January, the Attorney General Consumer Protection office sees a sharp rise in calls from consumers who are dealing with debt collectors because of unpaid bills. If you don't overspend, you can hold on to that good holiday cheer right into the next year.

Black appointees

Armstrong Williams
 Guest Columnist

President Bush has done far more to address the everyday concerns of black Americans than any president of recent memory.

That includes former President Bill Clinton, who became an honorary black man when he pledged to have a cabinet that "looked like America." And indeed, Clinton assembled the most racially and ethnically diverse cabinet ever. By the end of his first year, the Washington Post reported that 22 percent of his appointees were minorities.

Much of black America found this all wonderful and jaw dropping. They clasped the president close to their bosoms. And with good reason. The diversity of Clinton's cabinet facilitated more hiring - and elected representation - of African-Americans in government at every level. This created a positive ripple effect throughout the community. For example, a black politician may maintain close associations with other black community figures such as ministers, teachers, entrepreneurs and union officials.

These interlocking relationships proclaim to black Americans that they are part of the administration, while keeping the administration in touch with the chief concerns of the black voting populace.

Very good. But few in the news media acknowledged



Paige



Rice



Powell



Allen

that while Clinton facilitated the ethnic diversity of his cabinet, he tended not to appoint blacks to top policy positions. As former Clinton Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers snorted after vacating her post, the upper echelon of Clinton's cabinet is a "white boys club."

Like Clinton, President Bush has consciously assembled an ethnically diverse cabinet. The Washington Post reports that 25 percent of Bush's appointees are minorities. Bush has far superseded Clinton, however, when it comes to appointing blacks to top posts. According to a recent White House release,

minorities have filled 45 percent of the administration's highest policy positions. Most notable are the appointments of Gen. Colin Powell as secretary of state and Condoleezza Rice as national security adviser. Every time Bush enters the situation room, or sits down with foreign leaders, Rice and Powell flank him on either side. Other high-profile black appointees include Education Secretary Rod Paige, HUD Deputy Secretary Alphonso Jackson, Deputy Secretary for HHS Claude Allen and Veterans Administration Deputy Secretary Dr. Leo Mackay.

At the same time, Bush has

crafted an educational reform policy that holds the promise of a new civil rights movement. Currently, school districts mirror housing patterns. As a result, economically segregated communities have produced economically segregated public schools. The result is a brutal and arbitrary divide between rich and poor, urban and suburban, minority and white. There exists an astonishing body of evidence that these "poor, minority" schools are failing to properly educate their students.

Bush's educational reforms - specifically his support of vouchers - could help redress this inequality by holding public schools accountable for the proper education of their students, while ensuring that poor people - mostly of color - no longer remain trapped in schools that are failing to meet their needs. This change could be the single most important factor in redressing the achievement gap between the races.

Additionally, Bush has pushed programs aimed at facilitating home ownership, welfare reform and faith-based initiatives - all issues that are among the chief concerns of the black voting populace.

When Clinton proclaimed that he would facilitate racial inclusiveness within the government, the media all found it dazzling. When Bush did much of the same - and then some - the media barely took notice. But if the midterm results are any indication, this rousing fact has not gone unnoticed by the American electorate.