

OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

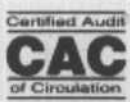
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Black voters and the N.C. Democratic Party



Val Atkinson

Jones Street

Most African-Americans in North Carolina who bother to register usually register as Democrats. But recently we've seen a bubble in that expected outcome. More and more African-Americans are registering as unaffiliated - deciding to shun both the Republican and the Democratic parties.

The data also indicate that there are about 95,000 unaffiliated African-American registered voters in North Carolina, which represents about 10 percent of all registered African-Americans in North Carolina. What could be causing the most loyal demographic of the state Democratic Party to consider not registering as a Democrat? Several reasons come to mind. First and foremost is the fact that North Carolina is becoming a very diverse state, and that includes diversity in political affiliations as well. Things aren't so black and white, so Republican and Democrat as they used to be. African-American transplants from the Northeast and the far West are bringing their own brand of politics with them, and in many cases that means being an independent or unaffiliated voter.

Secondly and most troubling for the state Democratic Party are home-grown cross-overs. Cross-overs from the Democrat-

ic side of the ledger to the unaffiliated side could mean the difference between winning and losing elections. But the overriding question for the party leaders has to be WHY? Why are native African-American North Carolinians changing their registration from Democratic to unaffiliated? I think that question needs to be addressed before any strategy can be mounted by the Democratic Party to increase voter registration, and GOTV (get-out-the-vote).

Another piece that should be a significant part of any African-American - Democratic Party discourse has to be a strategy to keep voters on the rolls. State Board of Elections data indicate that there were about 15,000 fewer African-American voters on the rolls in June 2003 than there were in October 2002 - not good. The N.C. Democratic Party in general and African-Americans in particular seem to be falling prey to the "one-time-voter" syndrome. "One-time voters" are folks who get wrapped up in an emotional election - for example, Jesse Jackson for president or Harvey Gantt for U.S. senator - but never vote again and are removed from the rolls.

If we are to keep African-Americans motivated and interested in the electoral process we must come up with a 360 degree strategy and a 24-7-365 commitment. The voter registration process should not be turned on and off for the election cycle only. If we're really serious about voter registration and voter retention, we must come up with a plan that has no boundaries. And the time to start is NOW!



Letter to the Editor

Thanks for coverage

To the Editor:

We, the Sisters of Bivouac, thank you for taking time from your very busy schedule to personally cover our first annual Juneteenth Celebration and Health Fair. Your article was informative and really covered what we are trying to do.

The event was a huge success and with the continued support of your paper and all of those who contributed, we look forward to an even larger event next year. Because of all of the contributions, we had enough food, drinks, gifts and prizes for everyone. Adults as well as kids enjoyed themselves, and we did not want to leave when it was over.

Juneteenth is a historical

occasion in the development of our country, of which so many of us are not cognizant. We hope to bring more awareness of this celebration to our community.

Breast cancer awareness is vital to the African-American community as well as other minorities and men as well as women. Many of the women who were serviced by the mobile unit had never had a

mammogram before. So as you see, the event served a great purpose in the community.

We enjoyed working with the YWCA's Sister Speak program and with any other programs that will aid our communities.

Jean Nunn-St. Preux

Worthy Matron

Sisters of Bivouac Chapter

530, OES, PHA

America forever tied to Liberia



Marshall Bass

Guest Columnist

It was my duty, honor and privilege to serve as the intelligence officer for the U.S. military mission to Liberia from June 1960 through June 1962. Before assuming that duty, I spent six hours a day, five days per week, for six weeks at the Military Assistance Institute in Arlington, Va., learning about the history, customs and mores of the Liberian society, which later proved of great benefit as a diplomat in a foreign country.

During those six weeks at the Military Assistance Institute, I was exposed to some of the best minds in the Foreign Service Institute, who convinced me that "nationalism transcends morality." Those words were never used as I can recall, but somehow the message was loud and clear. In other words, the interests of my country were first and foremost.

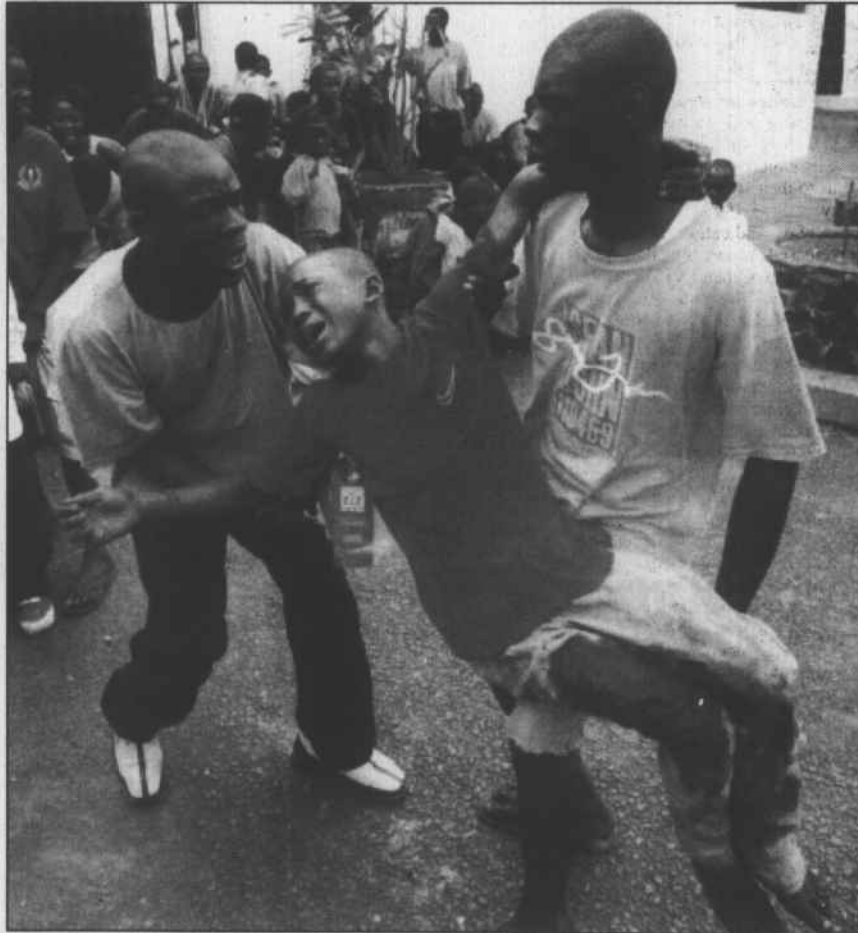
We learned that beginning around 1827, U.S. slave states became increasingly involved in getting rid of their free black populations. They encouraged the formation of the American Colonization Society. Both freed slaves and blacks in general were encouraged to leave America. Some of the "volunteers" were emancipated only if they agreed to go to West Africa. Maryland, Virginia and Mississippi established colonies in Liberia for former slaves and free blacks.

Free and enslaved black Americans continued to have hardships and inequalities.

A number of white Americans, for a variety of reasons, joined in their efforts to resolve this complex problem. One possible solution, which was advocated at the time with the assimilation of blacks into American society, was the complete separation of white and black Americans. Some voices called for the return of African-Americans to the land of their forebears.

In 1847, the Liberian colonies adopted the Liberian Declaration of Independence and formed a governmental structure similar to that of the United States with a president as the chief of state. Liberia was the first African republic. All of my learning at the Military Assistance Institute proved of great value to me during my tour.

Our tour of duty in Liberia was enjoyable and educational. The commanding general of the armed forces of Liberia, Gen. Harper, spent much of his time explaining the long-standing



In front of the American Embassy in Liberia, a wounded boy is carried by civilians seeking medical care for him.

friendship that existed between our two countries. One of his favorite recollections went back to the early days of World War II when the United States did not have air superiority of the Atlantic and therefore was not able to provide needed supplies and equipment to support our forces and Allied forces in fighting in North Africa. He would tell me time and time again that had it not been for Liberia's support to my country, the allies may not have defeated the Axis powers at all or, at best, the North African campaigns would have been prolonged.

Harper explained that through an agreement between our two countries, U.S. bombers would fly south from bases in Florida to Recife, Brazil. The planes would refill and fly to Roberts Field, Liberia, where U.S. and Liberian troops would service the planes for their destination in North Africa. Harper would often use this story of our country's relationship to support Liberia's military and economic requests to the United States.

Liberia had to pull itself up by its bootstraps. Unlike most of its neighbors, Liberia did not have a metropolis in Europe. It has to struggle on its own to survive.

The minimal military and economic support from the United States caused Liberia to be known as the "stepchild of the United States."

When I returned to the United States in 1962, I was assigned to attend the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Va. One of each student's requirements for graduation was completion of a thesis, which could be used by the U.S. military as a basis for further study. During that six months of study I spent untold hours developing a position on "The Feasibility of Establishment of a U.S. Military Base in Liberia." I presented my work to a group of senior military officers from the various armed services. They agreed that my thesis should receive and be further investigated by the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Because today Liberia is a subject of discussion at the international level, I reviewed my 1962 papers and continue to feel strongly that the concept continues to be valid.

It is my judgment that had the United States maintained over the years a closer relationship with Liberia, the military coup by Samuel K. Doe in 1980 would not have happened. Charles Taylor

toppled the Doe-led government in 1989, which led to a civil war between various ethnic factions for control of the nation. Doe was executed by rebel forces in 1990, and Taylor was finally elected president in 1997. Since that time, various elements have challenged Taylor and now call for him to step down. In the meantime, chaos prevails and human lives are lost. And unless the United States intervenes, we can expect no end to the situation.

Sometimes we tend to forget that, in part, the interests of our country gave birth to Liberia. Through our neglect, we, as a nation, share some of the blame for what Liberia has become. At this critical time of need, the United States should have a moral obligation to help right the wrongs that we have perpetuated over the years. I encourage the president of the United States to act now to send troops to Liberia and provide other aid and support to help bring peace and stability to the Republic of Liberia.

Marshall B. Bass is president of the Marshall B. Bass & Associates consultant firm. He is a philanthropist and a retired R.J.R. Nabisco Inc. executive.



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