

OPINION

Still on the plantation

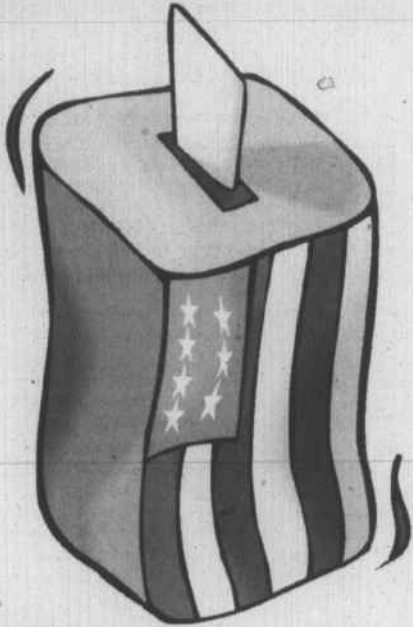
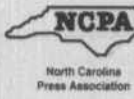
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Black vote critical



Ernie Pitt
This & That

The African-American vote is always critical, but this election year our vote is absolutely necessary if some candidates are to have a chance of winning. The critical issue here is not so much for whom you vote but the simple act of casting one's vote. You must make a commitment now ... today ... to exercise your right as a free citizen to vote. It is your way of participating in the political process. Please don't take it for granted.

Also, it is a lot easier to change things when you are a part of it. You can't sit on the sidelines and throw rocks at people when you are not in the arena willing to dodge bricks yourself. Some politicians count on us to stay home on Election Day and leave the voting to them. This year, the first Tuesday in November, I'm hoping that African-Americans will flood the gates of the polls and cast votes in record numbers.

A suggestion: Start right now reading and watching what candidates say and what they do. Listen carefully at their platforms. If you get a chance to go to a forum, go and ask questions. What are some things that are important to you? It does not have to be some sophisticated philosophical rhetorical diatribe about some complicated issue that only God can decipher. How difficult is it for your parents or grandparents to pay for their medicine? Do you have a job? What opportunities are available for minority entrepreneurs? Are African-Americans getting their fair share of government

spending?

In fact, the most difficult questions for politicians to deal with are the simplest. Listen to them and you will see how clever some of them can be. They never give you a straight answer. That's one good way to tell if a candidate can represent you: Do I really know what he/she is talking about? Chances are if you don't, you shouldn't vote for him or her.

One interesting group of politicians is judges. Now, you wouldn't think that a judge would be a politician, but he/she is. Judges have to stand for election. That makes them politicians. I don't agree that they be elected. I believe that they ought to be appointed because when you ask them a straight question they really are prohibited by law from saying certain things or making certain statements. Why, for heaven's sake, then, are they running? Anyway, judges tend to do their things once elected.

One way to judge a judge is to go to his or her courtroom a couple of times and see how he/she treats people. Some of them think that they are God Almighty, having no sympathy or empathy with anyone other than their cronies. I intend to tell you about one when we make our endorsements. You don't want to miss it because this, cat, uh, judge, is slick, and I want you to know how he operates. We definitely need to get rid of him, not her, but him!

Let's get reeaddy to rruummblllee! Y'all stick with me, ya hear? God bless you. Amen!

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of *The Chronicle* and the chairman of the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem Board of Commissioners. E-mail him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.



Harold Hairston
Guest Columnist

When African-Americans were slaves, we understood that if we had power, things would be better for all people. We would never put anyone through the inhuman treatment we suffered from plantation owners and slave masters. While we provided free labor, our families, friends and communities did not benefit from our work. Once free, we would never return to this system of exploitation.

Now we have exchanged one system of exploitation for another. This new system includes county commissions, boards of education, boards of election and city councils.

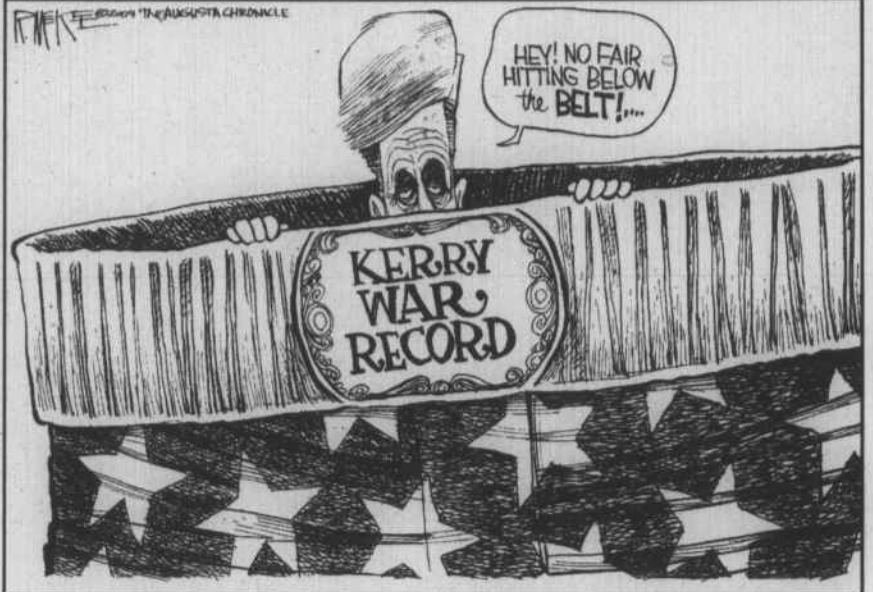
Everyone seems to agree that things have gotten better for colored people, but I say that we black folks are still on the plantation. The colored people are now Republicans, live in the suburbs and send their children to private schools. We black folks live east of Highway 52. We are Democrats because there is no other viable political party and George Bush must be defeated. Our kids go to public schools where the Board of Education cares nothing about educating minority students.

The Board of Aldermen - oh, I'm sorry, the City Council, with four or five colored people depending on whom you consider to be a minority - totally ignores the needs of arguably 50 percent of the city's population. While they are turning down Wal-Mart on the west side of town, there is very little public investment in the black community.

I have not forgotten about the county commissioners and Board of Education. We are powerless against these plantation owners. No matter what we say or do, whites will always vote together for what is best for their families, communities and interests.

The vote will always be the majority against two, if the two blacks stick together. Blacks are allowed only two votes on these governing bodies so power will remain where it has always been. It's time for a change.

Before you begin to think that I am blaming white folks for the black condition, I am not; I am blaming black folks for our condition. Too long we blacks have focused on whites to answer all our concerns. The destiny of any people lies with those people. The whites control both political parties, Democrats and Republicans, although blacks are the only ones voting for Democrats. Whites outnumber



black and control the County Commission (5-2), Board of Education (7-2) and Board of Elections (2-1).

The county commissioners raise our taxes and spend a lot of our money on Tanglewood Park and then do not provide public transportation to attend this park. For poor people, even if you can get to Tanglewood, there is a \$2 charge to use this public park. Most of the events at Tanglewood are designed for the rich and powerful. This is a publicly funded rich white country club, or, as I like to say, welfare for the rich, a Republican benefit from the county commissioners.

I heard one of the female members of the Board of Education say, "Why should we spend money over there when all they (blacks) do is cut and shoot one another." She was talking about the new Atkins High School. The answer is very simple: It is our money, our neighborhood and our children that the Board of Education is paid to educate. If the Board of Education were in the private sector and only one of two black students read at grade level, the entire board would be fired. The board would also be fired if the same statistics existed for white students. If this board will not educate our children now, they will pay to support (welfare) or incarcerate (prison) them later. Given this choice, it appears that the white community would rather build prisons than schools because there is profit in incarcerating black males.

As for the Board of Elections (BOE), rather than helping to vote, if you do not know your rights, the BOE staff actively discourages black voters. I had a discussion with the staff about where early voting sites should be located to allow the largest number of voters to participate. Any political party (Democrats) would place these sites where its voters are. According to the

BOE, most Democratic voters are in Clemmons, Kernersville, Walkertown and Reynolda Road. We had to fight to get one site at the Anderson Center. Even white Democrats take care of their constituencies while taking black voters for granted. It's time for a change.

The Democrats and African-American City Council govern the city of Winston-Salem. There are six Democrats and two Republicans, three whites and five blacks. This should mean that Democrats and blacks should benefit from decisions made by the council. Can you name one positive thing that our community has received from the City Council? Name one initiative put forth by your representative. When was the last time you were proud of the benefits provided primarily to our community? Remember that everyone benefits when his or her representative is in office because in election years representatives promise to pay attention to our needs and desires. This City Council spends millions on the Nissen Building and Adam's Mark because downtown needs revitalization. Name a local black contractor or investor that will benefit from the investment of our tax dollars.

Wouldn't you expect that the demographics of the city's workforce reflect the population of the city of Winston-Salem? I would venture to say that most of the high-paying positions are held by people who live outside of the city. Why should our taxes go to pay employees who give nothing back to the city while taking full advantage of the benefits provided by our tax dollars? It's time for a change.

The last voice of the freed African-American citizen is being silenced. Community Access Television (CAT-TV6) was not funded by the majority Democratic and black City Council of Winston-Salem. This

does not make sense because a lot of the CAT-TV shows are hosted by blacks and two are Democratic shows, including "African American Caucus" and "Voices of Democracy." Many of the other CAT-TV shows are about religion, another very important issue to the black community. This only demonstrates that neither the Democrats nor the African-American members of City Council give a damn about our politics or communities.

With the Winston-Salem Journal, a daily newspaper, and WSJS radio station appearing to be wholly owned subsidiaries of the Republican Party, there is no outlet for African-American free speech. This City Council is not helping the black community but eliminating our ability to persuade the African-American community to get out and vote and participate in the political process.

By the way, the City Council and County Commission kept their television station, Channel 13, government information, does not address our issues and concerns. The Board of Education has Educational Access Programming - Channel 12. I believe both stations are publicly funded with our tax dollars and give voice to the white communities.

This City Council eliminated our preferred media for communicating with the African-American communities, saying our taxes cannot be spent for our desires and needs. Everyone knows that black participation is good for the Democratic Party and black communities. This City Council votes against your interests and needs. Vote against them in 2005. It's time for a change. If you think about it, you know I am right.

Harold Lee Hairston is the head of the African American Caucus of the Forsyth County Democratic Party.

Competing interests?



Bill Fletcher Jr.
Guest Columnist

I recently attended an event concerning HIV/AIDS where a representative of Washington, D.C., Mayor Anthony Williams mentioned in passing that \$1 million from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had been cut from contributions to the District of Columbia. He indicated that "competing interests" led to the loss of the funds.

What immediately came to mind was the question of what could those competing interests have been? The \$1 million was to be used for HIV/AIDS prevention work targeting young people. What is more important than preventing the spread of the pandemic?

"Competing interests" is a very nice way of saying that funds that should be in the federal budget for social services are not there. They are not there because of political decisions made by this administration.

These political decisions demonstrate, once again, that the issue of HIV/AIDS is as much a political issue as it is a medical issue.

One million dollars cut from the D.C. HIV/AIDS budget, yet the administration has spent billions on the illegal war in Iraq. One million cut from the D.C. HIV/AIDS budget, yet the administration believed that it was fiscally sound to offer a tax cut to the wealthiest portions of the population.

What this situation further demonstrates is that the crisis in social services and assistance is not the result of the absence of funds, but rather that funds are not being allocated in a manner that addresses the common interests. The fact that D.C. has to suffer under such cuts is illustrative of the decisions that have been taking place since the early days of the Reagan administration to strangle the public sector, and so limit its funds that there exists no room to maneuver. Social programs to benefit the public are cut in the name of

putting funds into the pockets of the rich. This approach failed in the 1980s, and it is failing again.

Now, however, we are talking about cuts that are going to the bone. Not only are these cuts taking place, but further administrative restrictions are being placed on the usage of funds. Whether in the United States or overseas, money to address HIV/AIDS is being hamstrung by restrictions on the ability to discuss sexuality and condom usage. Such straitjacketing effectively means that the bulk of HIV/AIDS education becomes irrelevant, particularly to sexually active youths. Thus, "competing interests" becomes a question not so much about which programs will receive funding, but rather whether people will live, or whether they will die.

In an atmosphere of ongoing tension over whether and/or when the next terrorist attack will/may transpire, the HIV/AIDS pandemic destroys more lives than Al Qaeda could ever dream of destroying. Yet, this fact is regularly obscured

each time the terror alerts are raised and we are told that a new, potential terrorist has been identified, has become the source of speculation or has been apprehended.

"Competing interests" means, as well, that while Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America should be receiving substantial aid to confront not only HIV/AIDS, but also other illnesses, poverty, lack of jobs, and environmental degradation, this administration sees fit to plow more money into its illegal occupation of Iraq, the creation of more military hardware, and the further militarization of Third World countries, all in the name of fighting terrorism.

Go figure.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit educational and organizing center formed to raise awareness in the United States about issues facing the nations and peoples of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. He also is co-chair of the anti-war coalition United for Peace and Justice (www.unitedforpeace.org). He can be reached at bfletcher@transafricaforum.org