

FORUM

Nature of politics changing



Ernie Pitt

This & That



Ernie Pitt chats with Sen. Obama about his political and personal views during a meeting in Winston-Salem on April 29.

Sen. Barack Obama is seriously changing the face of American politics. Despite Sen. Hillary Clinton's refusal to acknowledge defeat and Sen. McCain's asinine fear-mongering tactics, Obama continues to bring more new voters into the political process.

Obama has weathered every dirty trick in the Clinton and Republican playbooks. He has dealt openly and honestly with the issue of race, which we have consistently viewed as an untouchable topic. The "elitist" accusation against Obama was merely a disguise for the term "uppity Negro." Everyone in their right minds knew that. The Clinton campaigners have unsuccessfully played the race card but have firmly been rejected by the American people.

Obama is right when he says that Americans are tired of the divisiveness that has characterized the American landscape for centuries. The Republican Party has held the pinnacle of power in this country for the last eight years and prior to that the Clintons. Yet, we are in the worst economic condition, the worst housing condition, two winless wars, corruption like we've never seen before and

politicians gouging themselves at the public trough. Obama has plans to end some of this and the American public; both black and white, believe and trust that he will do just that.

It is absolutely incredible that Sen. Clinton and Bush and McCain can look the American public in the eyes and say things that they know to be false. Here's a case in

point: Sen. Clinton says she leads in the popular vote (only if you count the votes of Florida and Michigan who violated the Democratic National Committee's rules by holding early primaries). Another case in point is the relationships that Bush and his administration have had with Iran, Hamas and even Osama Bin Laden.

Nevertheless, Sen. Obama

is engaging Americans of all colors, races and creeds to the delight of the electorate. No matter what happens in November, America will never be the same. Thanks to Barack Obama.

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of The Chronicle and President of the N.C. Association of Black Publishers.

New ideas needed at NAACP



George Curry

Guest Columnist

The votes are in and now it's time to rally behind the candidate. No, I am not talking about presidential politics. I am referring to the NAACP's decision to hire 35-year-old Benjamin Jealous as its next president.

Prior to the selection, I made no secret of my belief that another finalist, Rev. Frederick D. Haynes III of Dallas, would have made a better and more dynamic leader. I still feel that way. But now that the NAACP board has decided otherwise, this is no time to walk away from our oldest civil rights organization.

Supporting the NAACP does not mean it should be above criticism, however. The idea of having an up-or-down vote on a single candidate for president - the one favored all along by Board Chair Julian Bond - rather than allowing the board to vote on all three finalists was an exercise in raw political power, not fairness. And Julian Bond's decision to lobby for having tarnished primary ballots counted in Michigan and Florida represents the first time in my memory that he has been on

the wrong side of a major public policy issue.

Still, despite the asinine talk about our living in a post-civil rights or post-racial society, our major civil rights organizations are needed in this era of Jim Crow, Esquire. The National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium reports that although White men make up only 48 percent of the college-educated workforce, they hold 85 percent of the tenured college faculty positions, 86 percent of law firm partnerships, more than 90 percent of the top jobs in the news media, and 96 percent of CEO positions.

Obviously, there is still plenty of work to do. Although NAACP insiders didn't like it at the time, immediate past president Bruce Gordon did the association a favor two years ago when he revealed that, contrary to the claim that the NAACP has 500,000 members - a number the group has been using since 1946, according to the Baltimore Sun - the actual figure is less than 300,000. The NAACP likes to claim their membership numbers are roughly twice that, but they arrive at that bogus conclusion by counting people that have interacted with the NAACP electronically.

As I wrote at the time of the Gordon disclosure, the low figures are a reflection on us, not the NAACP. With a Black population of 38 million, there's no excuse for not hav-

ing more than 1 million dues-paying members. Of course, this lack of support is not limited to the NAACP. We fail to fully support the Black institutions that support us, including the Black Press.

The Census Bureau reports that there are more than 2 million Blacks living in New York City. Yet, according to a report last year by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, there were only 13,175 paid subscribers to the Amsterdam News in 2006. And that represented a decline of almost 30 percent over two years.

If the NAACP is going to grow its membership under Jealous, it will need to move away from some of the antics that grab headlines, but accomplish little else. During last year's national convention in Detroit, for example, thousands of delegates participated in a mock funeral organized by the local chapter to bury the N-word. The next time there is a funeral to bury anything, we should first make sure it is dead. And the N-word is far from dead.

According to a recent study by the Parents Television Council titled, "The Rap on Rap," the dreaded N-word had to be bleeped more than any other expletive from videos studied on BET and MTV. In Greenwood, Miss., a White member of the city council sent out an e-mail recently referring to a highly respected Black leader as an "ole" N-word. Not only is the

N-word not dead, it is not even injured.

If there is an area that Jealous may be able to make an immediate improvement in, it will be forming coalitions with other Black professional organizations. He has the contacts and inclination to bring about needed improvement in that area. The days of a civil rights organization being everything to everybody - if there was ever such a day - is over. It's time to turn to the experts in our community instead of pretending that civil rights groups have all of the answers.

There are some things the NAACP does better than any other organization. Its ACT-SO program, highlighting academic achievement, is exceptional. And the NAACP Civil Rights Report Card is an indispensable research tool for holding elected leaders accountable. Creating substantive and relevant programs is the key to bringing in new members, not resorting to gimmicks.

Ben Jealous is young, smart and committed. While he was not my first choice for the job, I'm hoping that he proves me wrong.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.

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