

OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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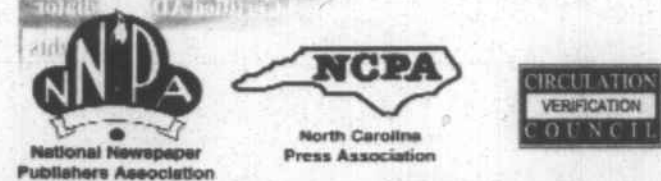


Photo by Jake Herrle/CNN
 These four men, from the Little Rock Central High School Class of 1968, are featured in the acclaimed CNN program.

Black in America?



Ernie Pitt

This & That

About 40 years ago, a friend of mine showed me a pictorial book entitled "American Pictures."

The book was a compilation of photos taken by a photographer from Denmark. It was filled with shocking photographs of what he (Jacob, pronounced Yahcub) considered to be the way blacks in America lived.

The book was filled with photos of drug addicts lying in the street with needles hanging from their arms and feet. Prostitutes were shown in bed with tricks; pimps beating women, some of whom were even pregnant. He went all over America, taking candid shots of every horrible aspect of human existence. One would have thought that every black in America was either a drug addict or an alcoholic - those who weren't were either in prison or on parole, of course.

My friend even went on tour with this guy as a living example, and helping to explain being black in America. I didn't like it then, and I don't like it now.

Before, it was a lone individual who was trying to depict black America as some freak show with no value, worth or civility at all. Now, CNN has essentially done the same thing.

CNN took the worst of Black America and made it into a sideshow of some species that live just beneath the surface of the good American life. I reject it, abhor it and curse CNN for perpetrating and depicting Black America the way they it

did.

More blacks are in prisons because they are more likely to be placed in the judicial system where the whole sentencing system is flawed. A case in point: crack-cocaine users get more time in prison than powder cocaine users. Guess who uses which kind of cocaine? Guess who gets profiled by state troopers across America? We all know that.

The program was disjointed, disconnected and shallow. It was an obvious attempt to take advantage of the interest that Sen. Barack Obama - yes, I said it - has created about black Americans. CNN wanted and got the ratings that it thought such a program would illicit. Trust me - it's all about the money. CNN used Soledad O'Brien - and everybody else seeking to be seen and heard on national TV - to increase its ratings and therefore its coffers. Mission accomplished.

I'm not saying that what they showed does not exist. However, in my humble opinion, that ain't Black America ... that's just part of Black America. The program lacked any kind of meaningful discourse on why those conditions exist for some black Americans. Many of those conditions exist not because of color, but circumstance.

I tried to tell the folks I was watching the program with before it came on that I didn't want to see it because I knew it was going to be a sham. And it was. So now it is being touted as a ground breaking series. Hog wash! We've been had again. God bless you. Amen? Amen!

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

CORRECTIONS

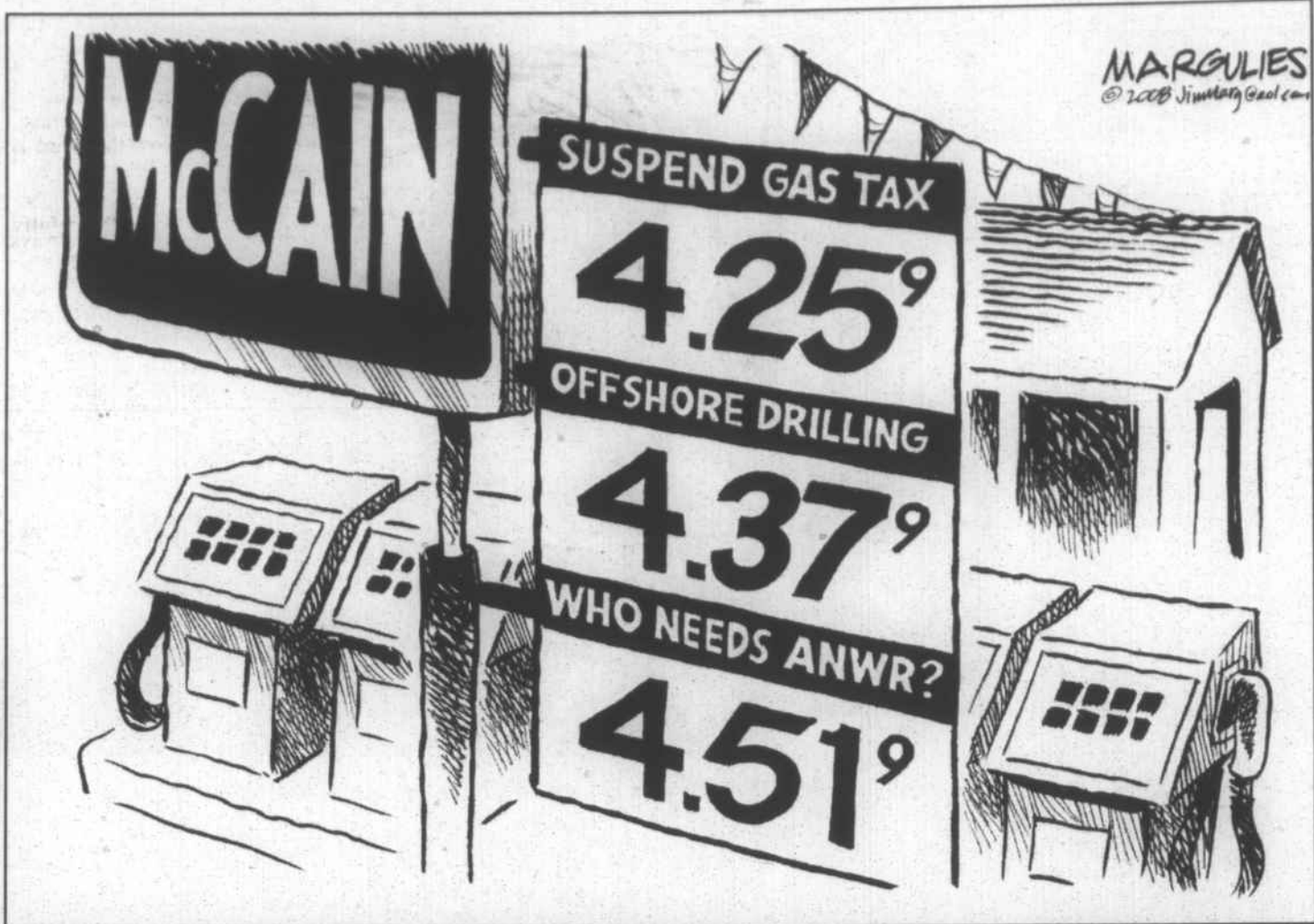


Taylor

The article "Conference attracts leaders from HBCUs" in last week's issue, incorrectly gave the location of Talladega College. The school is located in Talladega, Ala.

The wrong number was also given for Talladega's student population. There are 642 students at Talladega - Alabama's oldest private, historically black, liberal arts college.

School leader Cordara Taylor informed The Chronicle of the errors.



Barack Obama gives a speech to an estimated 200,000 at Berlin's landmark Victory Column.

AFF PHOTO BARBARA SAX

Obama Abroad: Arrogant or Confident?



Ron Walters

Guest Columnist

Barack Obama has just completed a flawless trip abroad, beefing up his presidential credentials. Received by cheering troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and over 200,000 people in Berlin, he met with General Petraeus in Iraq, heads of state in Germany, France and England, in a manner that saw him operate at a high level of statesmanship. But his trip has met grudging acceptance at home.

Moreover, his policy leadership was burnished to the extent that his judgment about the 16-month timeframe in which the United States should draw down its troops was confirmed by the Maliki Government in Iraq, which also forced George Bush to issue a statement of his desire for a reasonable time "horizon" in which troops should be withdrawn. Obama has proposed that Afghanistan was the central front in the war against terrorism and as such, needed more troops - which forced the administration to suggest that it would draw down troops in Iraq and commit one or two more brigades to Afghanistan. Finally, Obama's position that

he would meet with Iran without preconditions was bolstered by meetings between U. S. and Iranian officials recently.

Yet, race continues to be a powerful screen through which Barack Obama is evaluated. Several conservative as well as liberal analysts could not escape suggesting that in meeting with heads of state and giving a speech in Berlin at a prominent location that he was acting "too arrogant," as though he were already president.

Through the race screen they could not see the parallels to John McCain's meetings with foreign dignitaries since he won the nomination, nor the foreign trips taken by presidential contenders in other election cycles.

This evaluation of "arrogance" actually may be designed to cover up the base feeling of fear by some that not only that African Americans could be accepted on the world stage at such a high level, but that it eviscerates one of the primary barriers to conceiving of him as president as Obama gets closer to the finishing line.

While international affairs are often complex, for many the presumption has been that Blacks did not - or could not, because of their focus on domestic problems, or their lack of intelligence - understand foreign affairs. That was the criticism of some Israeli sympathizers in the media about Dr. Ralph Bunche, the

famed African American United Nations official who in the 1950s negotiated the first Arab-Israeli cease fire agreement.

Also, I remember hearing the same theme when Andy Young was fired from his job as Ambassador to the United Nations in 1979 and delegations of African Americans went to the Middle East to meet with officials and heads of state to "prove" that they not only had a right to speak about the Middle East, but were conversant with the issues.

Then, when Rev. Jesse Jackson prepared to go to Syria in 1984 to get Lt. Robert Goodman from prison, I heard the same refrain - Blacks don't know anything about the Middle East.

Well, if the racial presumption has been that the issues in the Middle East are far too complicated for Blacks, then those in Europe must really be out of the realm of - someone like Barack Obama, a Harvard trained constitutional law scholar.

For twelve years as a Senator he was not immune from having to deal with some international issues that affected his state, such as money being drained from the budget by the war in Iraq. So, Obama took a position against the war as an Illinois State Senator.

His speech in Berlin was criticized for not having been substantive, but this was not a lack of understanding the dis-

crete issues, it was no doubt, a strategy which said that delving into a laundry list of discrete substantive issues and offering proposals to fix them would open him up to the charge of negotiating in the place of the sitting president. The tradition is that this should not be done, even though George Bush criticized Obama on a foreign trip recently.

On the Black side, there also is a deep suspicion that what is at issue here is resentment of how Obama performed and that if the same kind of reception had been accorded John McCain or some other white candidate, there would not be the grudging acceptance we see, but there would be wild acclaim. The audacity here - and perhaps no little embarrassment - is the fact that a Black candidate holds out the prospect of reviving American standing in the global arena. Some just can't take it because it destroys the myth of racial inferiority that hides in the recesses of press critiques of this trip.

Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Center and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park. His latest book is "The Price of Racial Reconciliation" (University of Michigan Press).