

# FORUM

## Black Women and Breast Cancer



**Dr. Julianne Malveaux**  
Guest Columnist

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Millions of women are sporting pink ribbon pins in support of a month when organizations like the Susan G. Komen Foundation fundraise and galvanize people around the quest for a cure for breast cancer. They are right to raise awareness – more than 184,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States in 2008, and more than 40,000 will die from breast cancer.

While African-American women are less likely than White women to get breast cancer, we are more likely to die from it. The morbidity rate for White women is 9.4 per 100,000, compared to 15.4 per 100,000 for African-American women.

Additionally, African-American women often are diagnosed with breast cancer when they are younger, and when African-American women under 55 are diagnosed with breast cancer, it is more likely to have deadlier effects. Researchers are studying the reasons why African-American women are so much more vulnerable than other women are to breast cancer. But the findings make it important for African-American women to get regular mammograms and to deal



with other aspects of our health.

Whenever there are health awareness weeks or months, whether they are for breast cancer, muscular dystrophy, diabetes, or another cause, I crave attention to the broader issue of health care and health access. We can take a slice out of the health care challenge by focusing, in October, on breast cancer, but the fact is that part of African-American women's increased vulnerability to breast cancer is a result of differential access to health care and health services.

Too many African-Americans lack health insurance. Too many wear the stress of racism in poor eating and living habits, and it shows up with obesity, high blood pressure, and the higher incidence of other diseases in our community.

African-American women are more likely than any other population, in 2008, to be diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. When another population was

most likely to be diagnosed, HIV/AIDS awareness garnered headlines. Now, too many are silent about this disease, unless they are talking about the international incidence of HIV/AIDS.

It is not clear why our nation has not galvanized around the health care issue. To be sure, both presidential candidates have ideas about health insurance and health care; their plans are divergent.

In my humble opinion, Hillary Rodham Clinton had one of the best health care plans we've seen in a long time, reflective of the work she has spent on health care since she worked on it as First Lady in the Clinton Administration.

Senators Obama and McCain would be advised to review his plan and incorporate aspects of it into their own work. Somehow, every American must have access to preventive health care, and protection from bankruptcy when they are diagnosed with expensive diseases. And some-

how, as we raise awareness about breast cancer, we must also raise awareness about the ways breast cancer incidence is intertwined with the status of our health care system.

Breast cancer awareness has an international dimension. Hala Modellmog, President of the Susan G. Komen for the Cure, indicates that 10 million people will die in the next 25 years absent intervention around breast cancer. Last year, the Komen organization held a global advocacy summit in Hungary, and announced pilot programs in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. This month, they sent delegations to Ghana and Tanzania.

It is important to note that for all the challenges women face with breast cancer in the United States, health care access is even more limited in developing countries. The Komen organization is to be commended for their work in taking breast cancer global.

Back at home, though, the health care disparities that riddle our system are as present in the realm of breast cancer and in other areas. Sisters must be among those sporting pink ribbons, but beyond the pink ribbons, we must all be passionate advocates for increased health care access, especially in the African-American community.

*Julianne Malveaux is President of Bennett College for Women. She can be reached at presoffice@bennett.edu.*

## Obama Ahead – But Don't Believe It



**George Deukmejian**  
Guest Columnist

According to the polls, Barack Obama is steadily widening his lead over Republican rival John McCain to become the next president of the United States. A Washington Post-ABC News poll released Monday shows Obama with a 53 percent to 43 percent lead among likely voters.

There is only one problem – don't believe the polls.

As the *Washington Post* noted in a story on its poll, at this stage in 1992, Bill Clinton held a 14-point lead over President George H.W. Bush, yet he won by only 6 percent. In mid-October 1976, Jimmy Carter held a 13-point lead over incumbent Gerald Ford, but won by only two points.

When the issue of race is added to the mix, conventional wisdom – which is often neither conventional nor wise – goes out of the window.

Uppermost in the minds of African-Americans is the Bradley effect, named after former Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, who sought to become governor of California in 1982. Even last-minute polls showed him leading by a wide margin of victory. Yet, Bradley narrowly lost the election to Republican

George Deukmejian. Many say it was because White voters lied to pollsters about their willingness to vote for an African-American.

But it wasn't just, as John McCain would say, "that one."

Pre-election polls also overstated the margin of victory for Harold Washington in Chicago; David Dinkins in New York City; and Doug Wilder in Virginia.

But Bradley's race predated the Internet and cell phones and before Black music did more to erase racial barriers than any presidential speech. In fact, there are an increasing number of people questioning the premise of the Bradley effect.

In a story headlined, "Do Polls Lie About Race?" New York Times reporter Kate Zernike wrote: "But pollsters and political scientists say concern about a Bradley effect – some call it a Wilder effect or a Dinkins effect, and plenty call it a theory in search of data – is misplaced. It obscures what they argue is the more important point: there are plenty of ways that race complicates polling."

"Considered alone or in combination, these factors could produce an unforeseen Obama landslide with surprise victories in the South, a stunningly large Obama loss, or a recount-thin margin. In a year that has already turned expectations upside down, it is hard to completely reassure the fretters."

Looking back, some

observers say pollsters got it wrong with Bradley not because White voters lied to pollsters, but because they failed to factor in the absentee ballots. Whatever the reason, some researchers think that's less likely to happen today.

According to the New York Times: "In a new study, Daniel J. Hopkins, a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard, considered 133 elections between 1989 and 2006 and found that blacks running for office before 1996 suffered a median Bradley effect of three percentage points. Blacks running after 1996, however, performed about three percentage points better than their polls predicted."

As the debate continues about whether the Bradley effect is valid, the McCain camp continues to exploit the issue of race.

When Obama's name has been mentioned at McCain-Palin rallies, there have been cries of "Kill him!" and "Off with his head!"

It has gotten so bad that McCain has urged his followers to tone down the rhetoric. Away from rallies, however, his attack ads use code words to argue, as Palin put it, that Obama is "not one of us."

But observers have been able to see past the code words.

"From the start, there have always been two separate but equal questions about race in this election," Frank Rich wrote in the New York Times. "Is there still enough racism in America to prevent a black

man from being elected president no matter what? And, will Republicans play the race card? The jury is still out on the first question until Nov. 4. But we now have the unambiguous answer to the second: Yes."

Rich explained, "McCain, who is no racist, turned to this desperate strategy only as Obama started to pull ahead."

He isn't the only person who feels McCain is playing to racial fears.

"Obama has been running as a post-racial candidate from the start, and he has been doing it very well," David Brinkley, a noted presidential historian told the New York Times. "But the fact of the matter is that some voters – we can't know yet how many – will not get past his race. And I very much believe that the McCain-Palin ticket is tapping into that."

And there is plenty to tap into. In that same New York Times article, John Schuster, a Republican from Wheeling, W.Va., said, "What you hear around here is, 'Would you rather have a black friend in the White House, or a white enemy?'" He explained, "Most guys I know are for McCain, and a lot of it's because of race."

*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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The Chronicle was established by Ernest Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974, and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc. The Chronicle is a proud member of:

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