

OPINION/ FORUM

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Have Your Say Without the Insults

Political civility is dead. We know: that's not news to anyone. We were reminded by Felice Pete of just how uncivil – and uncivilized, to some extent – folks are these days.

The Wake County Republican Party leader came to town last week to speak at a gathering of the Forsyth County Republican Women. Her stated mission was to preach self-reliance, God-fearing family values and other GOP planks, but she found ample time to engage in the GOP's favorite sport: President Obama-bashing.

While calling the president "a guy who kind of has no religion ... (who) likes to kill babies," Pete also tried to make the point that the nation's first black president is anti-African American and anti-woman.

Pete was preaching to the choir at the GOP event, but her appearance didn't do squat to win over African Americans with conservative-inclinations. She pushed blacks and other minorities further away with her sanctimonious hate speech.

It is unfortunate that Pete and other black Republicans (e.g. Herman Cain, Allen West, Clarence Thomas, Vernon Robinson) feel that they have to prove that they are just as conservative as their white GOP counterparts by making the most extreme and unfounded statements. While this rhetoric may earn them pats on the back and cheers from the Republican masses, the rest of us – including those of us who want to give black Republicans the benefit of the doubt – see them as carnival sideshow acts.

If Pete believes the Republican Party is a better fit for the church-loving black community, why not simply say that without taking cheap shots at President Obama's faith? Stating how a GOP policy would lower the black unemployment rate, which has always been higher than that of whites, doesn't require personal, nasty digs either.

We simply don't understand why seemingly intelligent people like Pete can't simply present points and arguments without veering into crazy talk. This sort of Big Top politics may grab headlines and provide red meat for conservative die-hards, but is it helping a political party that is quickly falling out of favor?

If Pete is the kind of goodwill ambassador the party hopes to use to increase its numbers among people of color, then we fear the GOP's death is closer than anticipated.

Revaluation debate lacks leadership

The great hubbub over the Forsyth County Tax Administration's revaluations has not inspired much confidence in our elected officials.

The still shaky housing market led to some residents' homes taking a more than 50 percent reduction in value. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that communities of color have been most affected by lower revaluations. The banking industry ran roughshod in minority neighborhoods, offering shaky mortgages and sweeping in to foreclose a short time later. The city's East and Southeast wards have the greatest number of properties that lost more than 50 percent of their value.

Residents can file appeals with the Tax Administration office, but many are asking for a broader solution. At recent community forums, residents have asked about pushing back revaluations to a later date, to a time when perhaps the outlook will be better for all, but so far County Commissioners Walter Marshall and Everette Witherspoon, who represent the city's historically black communities, have offered few solutions to their constituents. (Although Marshall says he and his colleagues are working on one solution.)

The last revaluations were done in 2009. Forsyth County conducts them every four years, but the window can be as wide as eight years. Couldn't our leaders look into the crystal ball to see that revaluations in the current market would be disastrous for homeowners and city/county coffers and move to delay them by a year or so? Whose eyes were on the ball?

It is in times like these when real leadership is needed. Elected officials are apt at speaking at church services and smiling and shaking hands at grand openings, but when it comes to our pocketbooks and our piece of the American dream, we get nothing but shoulda, coulda, woulda. Something's not right about that.



Pete



Ending Violence Against Women

Bill Fletcher
 Guest Columnist

March is the official month to "discuss" women and it could not arrive too soon. What is sad about both Black History Month (February) and International Women's Month (March) is that too many of us think that those are the only legitimate times of the year to discuss these issues affecting these respective groups. In either case, attention to the plight of women, in March or any other month, is warranted.

Last year seemed to be the year to attack women. The language of many on the political Right during election season was so phenomenally backward that in a different context you would have wondered whether it was all an act.

Suggesting that there are acceptable and unacceptable forms of rape, for instance, once again puts the burden on women for the violence that they experience.

This issue of violence against women needs much greater attention and we must realize that it is not only a domestic issue. A very good friend of mine had to flee her country of origin because of the physical and emotional abuse she was experiencing from her husband, knowing that her community would never believe that someone of the stature of her husband would be capable of such crimes. More to the point, she knew that her community would somehow conclude that she, rather than her husband, was the source of the problem.

Stories over the past year about assaults on women in Egypt have made any sane person's skin crawl. But we should recognize that such assaults—rape and

molestation of politically active women—are not new. There is a long history of rape and other forms of violence being used—domestically and internationally—as a means to subjugate politically active women, and those women who dare to speak out on social, economic and political issues, and not necessarily just on women-related issues.

This year's Billion Rising protests were aimed at bringing international attention to the matter of violence against women. The consciousness and concerns raised by this and other such efforts needs to be sustained throughout the rest of the year. Real attention needs to be focused on young men so that they understand that violence against women is totally unacceptable. A different sort of attention needs to be focused on women such that those who experience violence do not internalize this experience, blaming themselves.

But the attention must also go to other women who, because of the male supremacist societies in which we live, will on occasion close their eyes and ears to the pain of victimized women, in the worst case joining in the chorus of putting the blame on women.

March 2013 is just the right moment to raise popular attention to violence against women. We have to shift the impulses, particularly of men, such that violence against women is not met with silence, nor met with excuses, but is met with support to women and condemnation of all perpetrators of violence.

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Django: Part Blaxploitation, All Genius

Bill Turner
 Guest Columnist

When I settled in to see "Django Unchained" recently, I was already pretty cynical because over the years I have grown quite distrustful and suspicious about most anything that comes out of Hollywood. This movie, with all the trailers and promos on the talk show circuit, had a drum roll that beat the "N" word as though we were being introduced to it for the first time. However, despite my distrust of the credibility of what comes off the silver screen where the subject of slavery is concerned – I thoroughly enjoyed Django.

For starters, Django let flow a star-studded cast. After all, Jamie Foxx, Christoph Waltz, Kerry Washington, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Samuel L. Jackson could – singularly, let alone together – get the average couch potato out to the movies. Genius loves company – Quentin Tarantino and company.

Usually, exaggerated blood spasms and gratuitous violence turns me off; but Tarantino's creative license made sense when I put myself in the seats of those who have neither read about the terrors of slavery nor who can visualize the tyranny slave masters and the rest who supported the system piled upon my ancestors for more than two centuries.



Christoph Waltz and Jamie Foxx in "Django Unchained."

Tarantino did a magnificent job at what he is best known for: close up HD shots that literally splattered blood on the camera's lens; the gut-wrenching quadrasonic sound of dogs' jaws crushing black arms, and those scenes of slaves loving each other – humanizing themselves beyond their scars and high-pitched horrors. The KKK shown as so many butt heads on horses was an absolute over-the-top hoot – now my favorite of all times scene in a movie!

What a superb make-up job on Samuel L. Jackson. I found myself so angry and upset with Jackson's Uncle-Tom-on-Steroids character that I had to remind myself that I was watching a movie. Mr. Jackson is one of the best actors in the world. Django unchained some brilliant camera angles, so well done as to have viewers like me suspend believability. It occurred to me that

the designer cowboy attire that Jamie Foxx wore for the last half of the movie was like few cowboys – white or black – I have ever seen, to include his Prada-looking shades. I heard a young man on the way out of the movie transfer Foxx's best line, "They never saw a nigger on a horse," to explain why a lot of people can't wrap their brains around the occupant of a certain house at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Life imitates art, in real time.

When I read that Kerry Washington's character's last name was Shaft, it hit me that Tarantino – with the cunning of a mastermind – had hoodwinked everybody. He has pulled off what was nothing less than the first Blaxploitation film of the 21st Century. I don't know if his target audience was urban blacks; but, 95 percent of those in attendance where I saw the film were young blacks. Obviously, however, the

flick had a lot of cross-over appeal: not only did Waltz win an Oscar but Tarantino waltzed away, his smirk now larger-than-life, with the Best Screenplay honor.

Django painted a picture for the abusive insides of slavery that I could see boomed to my 12 year-old granddaughter Africa, who accompanied us to the movie. I watched her fascination with many of the scenes, but she giggled, as in "this is soooo cool," when rapper Rick Ross and Grammy Award winner John Legend came on the soundtrack. When Django comes out on DVD, I will chain it to our copy of Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song.

Django Unchained was baad!

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