

Some are still battling 'massive resistance'

Virginia bills would include education as reparations

WILLIAM RASPBERRY



My feelings when it comes to reparations have run from cool to pretty darned hot.

I've been generally cool to the notion that black Americans are owed reparations because their — our — ancestors were enslaved with the blessing of the federal government; the problem of sorting out damages, victims and perpetrators is just too great.

The recent claims against certain American companies that admittedly benefited from slavery are a bit more interesting, though no easier to sort out. You can establish that the companies — Aetna, Lehman Brothers and R.J.

Reynolds among them — are continuing entities. But how do you get from the fact that Aetna made money insuring slaves to a payment of reparations to the descendants of slaves?

If you want to get my juices flowing, talk to me about the claims made by victims (and their descendants) of the 1921 race riots in Tulsa. It's pretty well accepted that the city officially folded its arms while white mobs destroyed black Tulsa's thriving businesses in the Greenwood section. The obstacles I see are statutory (how do you stop the clock on the statute of limitations?), rather than moral.

And then there is Prince Edward County, Va., where what we used to call the "white power structure" shut down the public schools

rather than integrate them in accordance with the 1954 school desegregation decision. The schools remained closed from 1959 until 1964, during which time there was no tax-paid education for black children. (White youngsters were sent to a newly established "private" academy.)

Victims of this last gasp of American apartheid have an obvious (to me) claim for the educations they were forced to miss.

What's more, the Virginia General Assembly agrees. Both houses of the state legislature passed bills unanimously to provide scholarships for the victims of Virginia's strategy of "massive resistance" to desegregation orders.

Yes, Virginia, there are reparations.

But backers of the legislation say it would take at least \$2 million to meet the expected claims. The most generous version of the state budget provides only \$100,000.

Virginia, you see, has budget problems.

"There are a lot of nice things we'd like to be able to do," House Education Committee Chairman James H. Dillard II said last week. "We have at-risk kids who are out there and are an immediate problem, and we had to cut \$41 million out of the budget that would have gone to them."

The problem, he and others insist, is not a lack of will.

Del. Viola Baskerville, a sponsor of the House version of the bill, isn't buying. With enough will, she insists, the state could find a way.

"We have passed budgets that contain \$1 million for a horse farm. We can find the money if there is a will. Education is a core responsibility, whether it's about children at risk now or children who were at risk 50 years ago."

Who could disagree with her? Even the \$2 million strikes me as an exercise in tokenism: a promise to provide the public-school education that is the commitment of all the states, but 40-odd years late, long after the effects of undereducation have taken their economic toll. (The legislation does provide for undergraduate education, in addition to funds for high school diplomas or equivalency certificates.)

It's hard to know what the recompense ought to be.

Think of the difference between your present circumstance and what it might have been if you had been forced to miss five years of schooling.

Or simply listen to John W. Hurt, who was 7 years old when they shut his school down. Five years later, when the schools reopened, he still had the reading skills of a first grader. He endured the taunts for a time, then dropped out of school. And now?

"If they had cut off my leg, I could have learned to walk with just one," Hurt, now 57, told my Post colleague Jo Becker. "But to take my education — I can't even think about what I might have been if they hadn't done that."

WILLIAM RASPBERRY is a Washington Post columnist.

Are Democrat pit bulls encouraging Bush attacks?

SHERMAN MILLER



The 2004 Democratic presidential primaries morphed from a solely presidential candidate selection campaign to a dogfight where pit bulls are unleashed to recklessly tear and slash at the presidency of the United States.

The Democratic Party election hope is to turn President George Bush's character from his strength to his weakness whilst allowing their candidate to appear above reproach for orchestrating any political skull-duggery.

Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry Mc Auliffe showed his pit bull tactics by exploiting the symbolic "there is fire in the hotel" antic in hopes of seeing who runs out of the building to take compromising pictures of prominent people. He charged that President George Bush was AWOL during his National Guard tenure. This AWOL allegation forced The White House to offer proof that this charge lacked credibility. What is troubling here is, if this allegation had merit, why was it not found credible during the 2000 General Election period?

In the Wisconsin debate, Rev. Al Sharpton called the president a liar in the harshest terms. Rev. Sharpton has a slim to none chance of winning the nomination, so one must ask why didn't he follow Howard Dean's lead and drop out of the primary process as Sens. John Kerry and John Edwards took one and two respectively.

Furthermore, Reverend Sharpton is not the Black political savior as Reverend Jesse Jackson achieved in his use of the Democratic Presidential primary process to garner mainstream legitimacy of being the 20th century black messianic leader. Therefore, Rev. Sharpton will not become the de facto president of the black community that now frees him to expand his pit bull attacks on President Bush without fear of the political consequences for his actions.

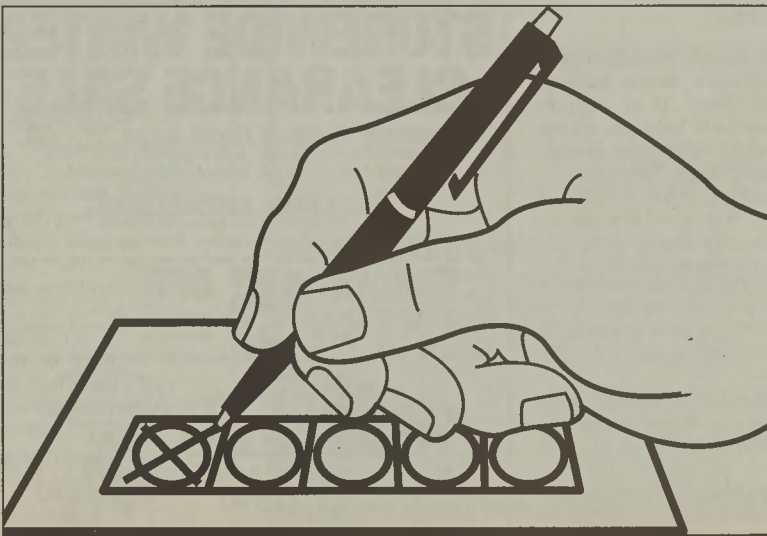
Dennis Kucinich's percent of the vote in the Democratic Primaries is at best insignificant. He was well behind Howard Dean; surely, he should have gotten out of the contest by now. However, Kucinich is a good pit bull. He should win an award for his role in accusing President Bush of lying on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

When you look holistically at President Bush's interview with Tim Russert on NBC's "Meet The Press," it is clear that the president knew that weapons of mass destruction would be a trying subject for him. However, President Bush gained character points because he didn't duck this tough interview. President Bush garnered the respect highlighted by John C. Maxwell in his book titled, "The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader."

Maxwell writes, "How a leader deals with the circumstances of life tells you many things about his character. Crisis doesn't necessarily make character, but it certainly does reveal it. Adversity is a crossroads that makes a person choose one of two paths: character or compromise."

SHERMAN MILLER is a syndicated columnist.

POSTSCRIPTS



New districts improve our voice

By Charlie Dannelly
SPECIAL TO THE POST

In 1965, the federal government enacted the Voting Rights Act to protect the rights of minority voters and to right the wrongs of the past. Since that time, the Voting Rights Act has been a key factor for state legislators in drawing new district maps after every 10-year Census.

We have come a long way. In 1983, only one African American served in the state Senate. Today, 12 percent of the Senate is comprised of African American lawmakers. And the 2003 Senate districts could increase that number to 18 percent.

Now awaiting federal approval for compliance with the Voting Rights Act, the 2003 Senate districts embrace the idea set forth in a landmark Supreme Court ruling (*Georgia v. Ashcroft*). This ruling holds that it is not only important for African Americans to have their voices heard in districts where black voters make up the majority of the population, but also to have their voices heard in other districts as well.

The African American members of the Senate were actively involved in the development of these new districts, and without our blessing the new map would not have been approved. It is also worth mentioning that noted civil rights attorneys, such as Adam Stein and Julius Chambers, have reviewed our map and have concluded that the new districts do abide by the Voting Rights Act.

Much commotion has been made about

the fact that the numbers of African American voters has been reduced in a few Senate districts. It is important to remember that this was done in order to increase African Americans' influence in other districts. As a result, besides protecting the existing African American Senate seats, this map creates two new open districts that also have an excellent opportunity to elect African American candidates: District 7 in the northeast and District 40 in Mecklenburg County.

Critics of this plan argue that it dilutes the voting strength of African American voters. These critics would prefer "packing" African Americans into districts with higher populations of black voters. On the surface, that approach may appear to strengthen minority representation - but in truth, it dilutes our influence by isolating our votes.

The question we must answer for ourselves is this: Do we want our voices heard in only a few isolated pockets of the state or in other areas as well? The answer is simple: we should maximize meaningful opportunities for African Americans to participate in our political process. We should not settle for having our say in just a few isolated black districts - in fact, we should demand to be heard in other areas where our votes can make a difference.

This map provides those opportunities beyond just a few isolated districts. That is in keeping with the Voting Rights Act on all levels - not just complying with the letter of the law, but the values behind it.

CHARLIE DANNELLY of Charlotte is deputy president pro tempore of the N.C. Senate.

OUR VOICES

What about Sojourner Truth Soup?

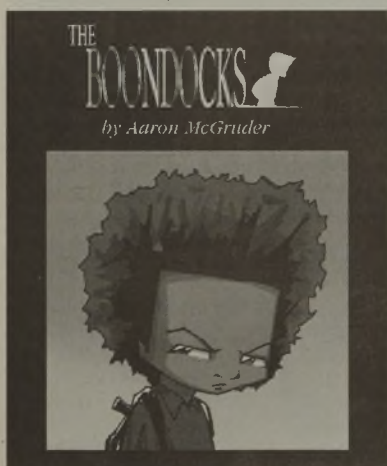
On February 11, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools served a lunch called the "Black History Month Meal." I looked forward to joining my kindergartner that day. I had no doubt that the fried chicken, cornbread, black-eyed peas and greens would be accompanied by the entertainment of a shuffling man in blackface introducing "The Birth Of A Nation."

I have read over that day's selection often, thinking that surely a school system that purports to teach accurate history to all of our children would not promote stereotypes, even in food, as fact. As a graduate student of history with an avid interest in foodways, I take issue with the limited view of history that such a meal promotes, and as a parent at the message that it reinforces...that black folk are one dimensional (chicken 'eatin', watermelon suckin') Sambos.

"Black" food is not chicken and gravy. The food of Black America reflects the complexity, diversity, and uniqueness of a race of people who are not monolithic; rather they originate from many cultures and ethnicities. The food of the black Diaspora includes, among thousands of others: Cape Verdean stew, Moroccan couscous, Jamaican peas and rice, Brazilian feijoada and Nigerian pepper soup.

While fried chicken may be southern, it is not uniquely African American. Why not celebrate Black History Month, like President's Day with "Fought Alongside Washington Waffles," Madame Walker Millionaire Muffins," "Tuskegee Airman Tarts," or "Thurgood Marshall Marshmallow Salad?"

Hope Murphy Elliott
Charlotte



Connect with The Post

Send letters to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144 Charlotte, NC 28230 or e-mail editorial@thecharlottepost.com.

We edit for grammar, clarity and space where necessary. Include your name and daytime phone number.

Letters and photos will not be returned by mail unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.