

# Kerry should delay accepting nomination

RON WALTERS



For Senator John Kerry, the presumptive presidential nominee of the Democratic Party to delay formal acceptance of the nomination past the July convention date would be a brilliant strategy.

On May 22, *The Washington Post* put the reason for it as succinctly as I have seen it. "The Democratic convention begins on July 26 in Boston, while the Republican convention begins August 30 in New York. Under federal law, each major party nominee will receive a check for \$74.69 million to finance that general election campaign. Receipt of the money is triggered by formal acceptance of the nomination, and after that point, no money raised for the primaries can be used on behalf of the nominee's campaign."

This means that the Republican party could continue to spend some of the \$200 million that it has raised a month longer than the Democrats who would have to stretch the check it received from the federal government five weeks longer than the Republicans.

While most of the attention has been focused on the money, the politics for me are just as fascinating. For example, as someone who has attended political conventions since the mid-1970s, I have found them less and less relevant as places where actual political decisions are made. The decision on the nominee is made in the primary elections and caucuses and only ratified by the convention in a long, boring process of tallying where each state reports its results. There is scarcely any change in the vote and precious little suspense about the outcome, its all a long drawn-out formality.

So, why can't Kerry arrive at the convention, thank the delegates for their hard work, laud the party leadership, and say that you will consider their recommendation and will formally respond at a later date. What changes? Nothing. In fact, the entire country and the political process is acting now as though Kerry is, in fact, the Democratic party nominee, so why can't he use this to his advantage now that he is confronted with a financial issue that might cost him the election.

Opponents of this move say that Kerry is endangering his "bump" from the con-

vention and the press coverage that makes it happen. But it is unlikely that the media will pull out of covering the convention because Kerry does not accept the nomination, which comes at the end of the convention. In fact, one of the great deficits to democracy is that the major media barely cover the conventions now, feeling that they eat into their revenue producing time.

To the extent that they cover it, the press will likely be interested in the show, the political spectacle that the convention now presents, complete with the high profile performances in the guise of speakers and special personalities trotted out for one reason or another. The guessing game will be focused on what will Howard Dean, Al Sharpton or Dennis Kucinich say and how will they say it.

Most important, the Kerry campaign will have an opportunity to structure the convention to bring considerable focus to bear on the issues with which he and Bush disagree. In short, the interest of the American people in conventions is most often centered on the messages and personalities and structuring the convention to beef up these dimensions will continue to capture their attention.

Nevertheless, there is a risk here in that the skillful presentation of issues - beyond the formalism of debating the convention platform - could be a formidable weapons that the campaign could use at a time when most people are turning their attention to the campaign for the first time. This means, however, that the issues have to be powerful enough and artfully enough presented to make a difference and that is the challenge.

I would remind everyone that Al Gore effectively pulled his campaign out of Ohio in the remaining weeks of the 2000 election in order to consolidate his financial resources for the battle in Florida. That step may have cost him the election because he only lost Ohio by 4 percent with the Ohio Democratic political establishment screaming for more resources. For Kerry to risk losing by poor planning at this stage could spell disaster as his campaign runs out of money in the remaining weeks of the election.

Still, this is a time to turn crisis into opportunity. The convention could give the campaign a good jumping off point, provided it uses the opportunity effectively.

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POSTSCRIPTS

# The Hollywood Shuffle continues for black actors

ANGELA LINDSAY



Many African Americans were incensed when Halle Berry was awarded the Academy Award for her role in "Monster's Ball," which showcased the actress in a graphic, all-nude sex scene with Caucasian actor Billy Bob Thornton.

Many were equally appalled that, after years of positive, notable performances in movies like "Malcolm X" and "The Hurricane," Denzel Washington was finally honored with a best actor Oscar for his role as a rogue cop in the movie "Training Day." It has always been difficult for African Americans to find film work, especially quality work, and to be recognized for it in Hollywood.

Most black films of substance seem to go relatively unnoticed while black movies chock full of buffoonery and bug-eyed foolishness reign supreme at the box office. After learning of the recent release of a movie titled "Soul Plane" about a "ghetto-fabulous" black-owned airline, it became clear to me that the need for quality African American film is at an all-time high.

The powers that be in Hollywood are cowards - banking on formulas that have worked in the past, no matter how outlandish, and afraid of risking anything to the contrary, no matter how brilliant. Unfortunately for African Americans, such practices reduce most of our film choices to fluff and folly. It seems every year a new crop of the same old black storyline springs up on the big screen: boy meets girl, boys acts a fool, girl takes boy back. I could scream if I see one more movie starring Gabrielle Union or Morris Chestnut in a romantic comedy.

These genres are tired, and so are we. I know for a fact that there is plenty of fresh, African American talent in the film industry on both the sides of acting and screenwriting. The problem is Hollywood doesn't think African Americans will support film which reflects black actors in superior, more dramatic roles. And given the gross ticket sales of movies like "Barbershop 2" versus films such as "Antoine Fisher," Hollywood is right.

Sure, Chris Tucker received \$20 million for his work in the "Rush Hour" movies, but as entertaining and successful as that movie and others like it may be, they run the risk of typecasting us into the jester characters of old.

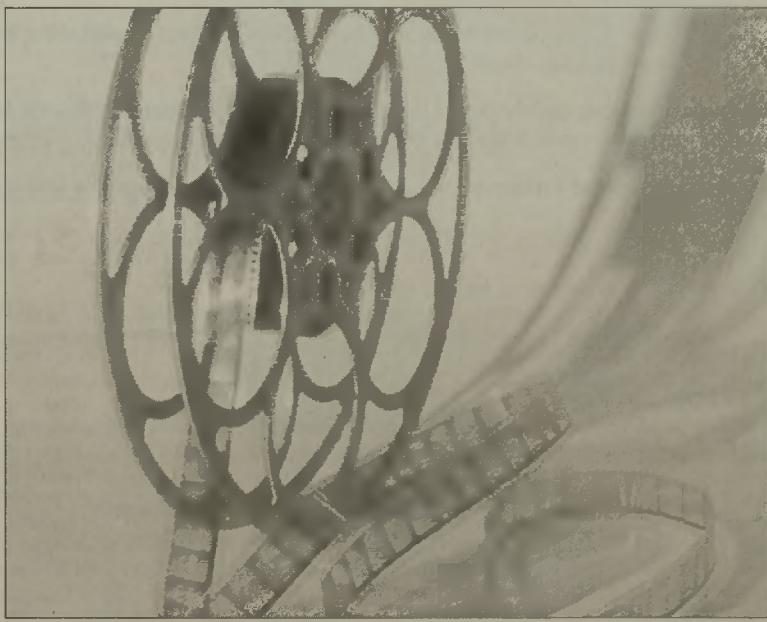
Except for Will Smith, Halle Berry, Wesley Snipes, and Denzel Washington, very few other African American actors possess the crossover appeal necessary for major studios to back films with black actors in principal, non-stereotypical roles. Therefore, they opt for the less inventive but more popular slapstick comedies or the shoot 'em up gangsta flicks starring hip hop stars, which leaves many trained black actors unemployed and uninspired.

While chomping at the bit to land superior roles, many black actors will take what they can get in the meantime in an effort to support themselves and what little careers they have, which explains why we see so many of the same actors doing the same thing. Very few have the luxury of refusing work over and over again if they want the offers to keep coming in. But when that happens, we get pigeonholed into certain personas, Hollywood does not take us seriously, and prestigious industry recognition, like the Oscar, remains elusive. It's a vicious cycle partially propelled by indifference and lack of audacity on our part.

One way the film industry will be forced to produce more quality black film is for us not to digest the C-rate garbage they feed us. Some will argue that just getting any black film produced is better than no black film at all. Again, that's where we come in. Black actors and those few African Americans with industry clout, if they are serious about the craft, should also take it upon themselves to create studios in which to produce alternatives to the majority of black movies we see today, and, hopefully, we will support the effort.

Going to film festivals, supporting independent African American film and the few quality black films that do get produced by major studios is a start. Here in Charlotte, events such as Reel Tuesdays and the Black Cinema Café have regularly showcased meritorious independent black films. In this way, little by little, we will send a message to Hollywood that black folk are capable of and require a more reputable presence at the box office.

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D.G. MARTIN



## Whom to blame for prison abuse?

Whom are we going to blame?

I thought of that question this week while reading again about the Shelton Laurel Massacre during the Civil War. Confederate troops who were guarding a party of Union loyalists in western North Carolina simply executed them. A witness reported the massacre and the resulting news story embarrassed and demoralized supporters of the Confederate cause.

North Carolina's war governor, Zeb Vance, insisted that the guilty parties be brought to justice. But the Confederate military delayed. The "unfortunate action," they argued, had been provoked by the ongoing terror activities of the Union loyalists in the region. More importantly for them, the leaders of those who did the killings were critical to holding the mountain region secure for the Confederates. As bad as the massacre might have been, the army was reluctant to do remove commanders who would be hard to replace.

Unfortunate as this massacre was, Zeb Vance was reminded that these kinds of things happen during a war - particularly one when an army is trying to pacify an unfriendly population.

One hundred and forty years later, we have the same kind of problem with Iraq that the Confederates had with Shelton Laurel - finding people on our side to blame and punish for the terrible things that are a part of this kind of war.

The question that came to my mind as I remembered Shelton Laurel was, whom do we blame for the terrible treatment of prisoners and detainees in Iraq?

Private Lyndie England and her colleagues who show up in the photos as active violators of minimum standards of human decency? Their direct commanders? The officers at the top of the chain of command?

Or Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, himself, who, next to the president, sits at the desk where the buck stops.

I have another candidate on whom the blame should rest. You. Yes, you. You knew about these things - about what almost always happens during wars and occupations. You can't pretend you didn't.

Our own close-by history teaches us what human beings can do to other humans in times of strife. At Shelton Laurel, otherwise good men shot their defenseless prisoners. "I didn't want to," some would say, "but I was told to follow orders or fall in with the prisoners and get shot myself."

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