

Why blacks don't vote Republican

The recent votes in the House of Representatives to block reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act and in the Senate to reject an increase in the Minimum Wage, give powerful voice to the reason why blacks respond by saying no to Republican candidates. In this case, we see clearly the politics of the economic and social wings of the party at play.

The current Republican Party was created in the Nixon landslide of 1972 when a substantial portion of the South joined it, adding to its growing economic conservatism a group that was deeply conservative on social values. In combined form, it constituted a political rejection of the government's values and spending at that time which produced the War on Poverty, the Great Society program and the changes wrought on society by the civil rights movement.

The Voting Rights Act was perhaps the most successful and important piece of civil rights legislation the country has produced by its empowering effects on the Black community's right to vote. The Southern states enacted and practiced the most oppressive measures that limited that right, and the passage of that Act created a powerful incentive for the White political leadership in the South to switch parties and to fight to regain their ability to rearrange access to the franchise in ways that would have racially discriminatory outcomes.

A recently-released book, "Stealing Democracy" by George Washington University Law professor Spencer Overton, indicates that in state after state in the South, where Republicans are mostly in political control, they have attempted to enact election requirements that disproportionately reduces the access of blacks to the ballot box. A recent example is the passage of onerous ID requirements to register and to vote, but there are many others.

Although the South is by no means the only region where there is an attempt to limit the right of blacks and Hispanics, in particular, to vote, the ferocity of the opposition to the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act in the House Republican Caucus is led by politicians from that region. This speaks volumes about the deep and brooding attitudes toward blacks that persist in the South that are a carry over from that region's dominant participation in slavery, despite the claim that such attitudes no longer exist in the "New South."

The conservative economic wing of the marriage that led to the modern Republican party is vexed over the demand by Democrats in the Senate to increase the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25, while demanding that the poor work, reducing its real social benefit. The current minimum wage has not been adjusted for nine years, meaning that it now produces \$10,712 of income, raising a person just \$900 over the poverty level, but a family with two children falls \$5,900 below it. In the same period, Congress has voted itself annual increases amounting to \$31,600, and the average CEO makes 821 times that level of wages.

The rejection of the economic wing of the party is based on the canon that if a small business has to pay the minimum wage, it will work to the disadvantage of poor workers because fewer of them will be hired or retained. But there is credible research that rejects that proposition. In this game of "choose your economist," it turns out that you choose a conservative one, the highest rate of job losses attributable to the minimum wage has been calculated at just 2 percent. But this should be calculated against the enormous off-the-book profits paid on the backs of illegal immigrants.

At a recent convention in Gary, Ind. on the economic condition of the black community, there was strong support expressed for an increase in the minimum wage. It has been a staple of the demands by groups such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, its partner the AFL-CIO, the civil rights community and others.

Why should blacks vote for a party that rejects legislation that would improve their economic condition and substitute gay-marriage in its place? Blacks have been unusually reliant on measures like the minimum wage and the earned income tax credit because it is a community that is disproportionately poor.

The Republican Party is approaching another moment of truth in its positioning toward groups that need a fair distribution of national opportunity and resources that makes it real. Thinking people should understand that the Southern wing's effect on the Republican Party's decision to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act and their politically powerful small business wing's continued rejection of an increase in the minimum wage, makes a mockery of party chairman Ken Mehlman's so-called "outreach" program to minorities.

Moreover, if these attitudes don't change, the record number of blacks competing statewide on the GOP ticket will go down in defeat.

RON WALTERS is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, Director of the African American Leadership Institute, Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.



RON WALTERS

Aren't you proud to be black today?

You know, sometimes it pays to take a little time to reflect on just who we are.

From time to time, we should think about our relatives, and our people in general, and reflect on the contributions they have made to this world and, most especially, to this country. We should take time out to give ourselves credit for being, as Ed Robinson, author of "Journey of the Songhai People," calls us, "The fittest of the fittest of the fittest" black people on the face of the earth. Don't you think we deserve kudos for not only surviving but thriving in this land we call America? I do. So, let's begin.

If you had the privilege of knowing your grand and great grand parents, you were probably witness to some of their amazing talents and abilities. You also had access to their knowledge and wisdom, although many of us didn't learn from it. We saw our relatives build houses without architectural drawings, cure diseases without doctors and prescriptions, stop bleeding with cobwebs, raise enough food for their families and two or three others, cure meat in a smokehouse, dig wells, and draw poison out of a cut with a piece of fatback.

Our relatives could make a meal out of what we thought was nothing; they could sew up the holes in our socks, patch our jeans, and put cardboard in our shoes to make them last just a little while longer. They could deliver babies, as my great-grandmother did for the birth of my brother and me. They helped one another with whatever they had, and it was dinner time at all the neighbors' houses anytime we wanted to stop by.

Remember the hambone, checkers, homemade ice cream you had to churn, a pot of beans and some cornbread all week long, and that nasty, greasy, slimy, castor oil? How about having to take cod liver oil every morning, and cold oil and sugar, goose grease, rock candy and whiskey, and that stinking little bag some of us had to wear around our necks when we were sick? Our relatives knew their stuff, didn't they?

The music they made was unbelievable. Their voices and their mastery of musical instruments, even without the benefit of formal training, was something to behold. Our folks were some piano-playin', guitar-pluckin', drum-beatin', horn-blowin', high-steppin', sangin' brothers and sisters — and they still are. Doesn't that make you proud?

And then there were the economic collectives they established to help take care of burials and other critical issues. Our people knew they had to pool their resources, and they knew they had to take care of themselves. Maybe that's why they knew how to do so many things with their hands. As I look back at my grandparents, aunts, and uncles, I am amazed at what they did during what were pretty rough times, at least socially.

They established their own business enclaves all over this country, places like Greenwood in Tulsa and Hayti in Durham. They amassed wealth beyond imagination and, comparatively speaking, far beyond what most of us have today. Prohibited from participating in the general marketplace and without the government subsidies handed out to white-owned corporations, they started businesses and eventually created A.G. Gaston Enterprises, S.B. Fuller Company, Madame C.J. Walker's hair products, Johnson Publishing Company, and Motown Records. What strength and determination they had.

Aren't you proud of who you are, where you came from, and what your relatives did to make sure you had food on the table, clothes on your back, and a roof over your head? We should celebrate our Blackness and always cherish our culture. As Claud Anderson teaches, we should be proud to be black because God made us first, in His image, and He placed us in a perfect place, on land that contained every vital mineral and natural resource necessary for growth and prosperity. He gave us enough wisdom to share with the world and bring others out of the darkness into the light of knowledge. We are His special people.

So with all of that going for us, why wouldn't we be proud of who we are? A lack of pride and love for ourselves would be an affront to God, like slapping Him in His face and saying, "I don't like what You did. Yes, you made me first, you made me special, you gave me wisdom, you gave me the richest land on earth, and you made me the strongest among men but, God, you also made me black, and I don't want to be black. It's too hard being black; it's too stressful being black, God. And if you want to know the real truth, God, I am ashamed of being black."

Can you imagine some of our people thinking that way? I know we have been through a lot in this country and the struggle continues, as they say, but truth can never be destroyed; hold on to it. We are still here, still standing after all the blood, sweat, and tears of our people. Black people have persevered, and we will continue to do so.

Take a moment to give some credit to your people, those who survived so you could be here today, "the fittest of the fittest." Give honor to those who have passed on and be proud of what they did.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce.



JAMES CLINGMAN

North Carolina books that bear closer review

Here is a deal for you.

I will give you some good ideas for your summer reading if you let me promote the upcoming season of North Carolina Bookwatch.

First, some good news. UNC-TV will broadcast Bookwatch during the next few months on Friday evenings at 9:30 in addition to its regular time at 5 on Sunday afternoon.

Now, here are 10 books for you to consider for your reading and for you to give to others during the vacation months.



D.G. MARTIN

First of all, look at Will Elythe's memoir about his and his family's passionate and seemingly unreasonable fixation on the basketball rivalry between Duke and Carolina. His book is not just for basketball fans. It delves into family relationships and touches on the drive so many of us have to "holler for our team." "To Hate Like This Is to Be Happy Forever" has been a bestseller across the country.

Kristin Henderson's "While They're at War" reports the personal stories of families of service men and women who serve during the war in Iraq. Many of these poignant stories are set at Fort Bragg and other parts of North Carolina.

In "Mirror to America," John Hope Franklin writes with both dignity and passion about the humiliations and triumphs he experienced as he became the leading historian of the African American experience.

Tom Carlson's "Hatteras Blues" takes us to the Outer Banks and into the lives of families who developed the sports fishing business there. Anyone who loves our threatened coast will be moved by this story.

On the fiction side, there are several choices. Mystery fans will love two North Carolina "page turners." John Hart's first novel, "King of Lies," a murder mystery set in Salisbury, is already a national best seller. It is so popular that the publishers already want another one set in Salisbury.

Raleigh's Andrew Britton wrote "The American" while he was a student at UNC-Chapel Hill. This "terrorism thriller" gives us an inside look at Al-Qaeda and the CIA and takes us all over the world chasing down a plot to kill the President.

Two North Carolina books tell the story of young women who are crushed by the breakup of friendships. Sarah Dessen's "Just Listen" focuses on the experiences of modern teenagers. Dessen's earlier novels, a film based on two of her books, and her popular "blog" have made her a popular national personality. In Leah Stewart's "The Myth of You and Me," a broken friendship opens the door to a deep and complex story of a young woman's struggle to make sense of her life.

David Payne's "Back to Wando Pass" got great reviews and is steadily rising on the bestseller list. Its story is set both in the present day and in Civil War times. Like "Cold Mountain," it is rich literary fiction and, perhaps, a classic.

The new edition of "New Stories from the South" won't be available until the end of the summer. But it is worth waiting for. Famed author, Allan Gurganus, selected 20 short stories, each of which will both entertain and rattle our settled way of looking at things. Gurganus opens the collection with a stirring essay about the current place of Southern writing in American life.

If you would like to hear more before you read any of these books, watch the authors talk about them on North Carolina Bookwatch, Fridays at 9:30 p.m. or Sundays at 5 p.m.

D.G. MARTIN is the host of UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Fridays at 9:30 p.m. and Sundays at 5 p.m. www.uncv.org/nccbookwatch/

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