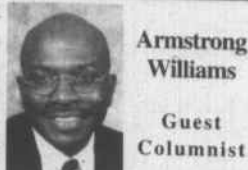


FORUM

Majority leader Tom DeLay talks race



Armstrong Williams
Guest Columnist

"The democrat's policies for the last 30-40 years have failed African-American and have failed the rest of the country."

So said House Majority Leader Rep. Tom DeLay when we sat down with me recently for a frank discussion on the mysteries of skin pigmentation in this country and what it would take for America to huddle together as a more equitable society.

Throughout the conversation, one key phrase kept repeating: "equal opportunity." For DeLay, equal opportunity doesn't mean embracing racial quotas or other policies that implicitly link victim status with the hue of one's skin. Nor does it mean supporting bottomless entitlement programs that dispense money to the underprivileged like some government-subsidized tranquilizer. Simply handing money out to the needy fails to create equal opportunity because it does not confront the problems that underlie poverty, like deteriorating family values and the absence of future expectations in poor neighborhoods.

That's why DeLay supported reforms to the welfare system that increased the work requirements and funneled federal resources into state run programs geared

toward strengthening family values. According to DeLay, such changes imbue children with a sense of pride and future expectations. "Children are looking up to their parents because they are getting a paycheck not a welfare check," says DeLay. Additionally resources



Tom DeLay

could be used to empower charities and religious organizations to provide positive role models. In short, equal opportunity starts with strong families and the ability of a child to affix value, hope and meaning to their existence.

Other violations of equal opportunity are government programs that embrace victim status for individuals or subsidize laziness; but the ultimate violation of equal opportunity are racial quotas. "Affirmative action had a good idea to begin with and that was to level the playing field so that everyone could have equal access," says DeLay. The problem occurred when the government hijacked the program by focusing on quotas, rather than on those social conditions that underlie inequality. "The government decided to come in and provide equal opportunity by numbers rather than equal opportunity

by stopping people from discriminating, or equal opportunity by assuring that African Americans have access to decent schools or by making sure that job opportunities were based on equal opportunity not race or gender," says DeLay. We need to "come together as a color blind society where the government doesn't pick winners of losers but the government mandates that everyone have an equal opportunity based on the capacity for each individual to grab opportunity and make something of themselves."

Yes, racism exists. But that does not mean we need to legislate group rights. Common rights derive from a common humanity. That means eschewing the victim status that is inextricably bound up with racial and gender based quotas. As Justice Thomas once observed, "the [civil rights] revolution missed a larger point by merely changing their status from invisible to victimized. . . Minorities and the poor are humans, capable of dignity as well as shame, folly as well as success. We should be treated as such." For men like Tom DeLay and Justice Thomas, the equality and essential dignity of all human beings, not just American blacks, is the point. These are the ideas that are embodied in the Declaration of Independence. And these are the ideas that are the lifeblood of an equitable society.

Whether or not leading Republicans can adequately convey these ideas to the black vot-

ing populace is another story. President Bush garnered less than 10 percent of the black vote in the last election. At least part of the problem is a cultural stereotype that equates the Republican Party to an old boys network that is out of touch and indifferent to the chief concerns of black America. "That's absolutely false," demands DeLay, who promptly adds that "There were a larger percentage of Republicans voting than there were democrats voting for the Civil Rights Act. . . the Republican Party has always been the party of equal opportunity and has always protected those who have been oppressed. Perhaps we just haven't done a good job of telling our story."

Perhaps. But a good place to start would be backing some black Republicans for elected office. Currently, there are no black Republicans representatives in the house or senate. About one quarter of the membership of the Democratic National Committee, by contrast, is black American. This strong representation proclaims to black Americans that they are part of the Democratic Party.

DeLay has it right when he says public policy should provide the opportunity for an individual to haul along his own life. But unless the entire Republican Party (house and Senate) does a better job of telling their story, few minorities will bother to listen.

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Nigel Alston is on vacation. His Motivational Moments column will return next month.

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Jessica Lynch: A weapon of mass distortion



George Curry
Guest Columnist

There is no question that U.S. Army Pvt. Jessica Lynch suffered serious injuries in Iraq. Lt. Col. Greg Argyrous, who supervised her three-month recovery at the Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C., detailed them in a TV appearance on "The Early Show." He said Lynch's injuries included "a fracture of her right upper arm, a fracture of three bones in her back, fracture of her right shoulder blade, two ribs. She fractured her upper and lower left leg, her lower right leg and in addition to multiple fractures in her right foot. She suffered large laceration of her scalp that was repaired in the Iraqi hospital."

How Lynch suffered those injuries is a story within itself.

"She was Fighting to the Death," an April 3 "Washington Post" story by Susan Schmidt and Vernon Loeb, was headlined. It began, "Pfc. Jessica Lynch, rescued Tuesday from an Iraqi hospital, fought fiercely and shot several enemy soldiers after Iraqi forces ambushed the Army's 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company, firing her weapon until she ran out of ammunition, U.S. officials said yesterday."

It continued, "Lynch, a 19-year-old supply clerk, continued firing at the Iraqis even after she sustained gunshot wounds and watched other soldiers in her unit die around her in fighting March 23, one official said. The ambush took place after a 507th convoy, supporting the advancing 3rd Infantry Division, took a wrong turn near the southern city of Nasiriyah."

The writers said, "Lynch was



Private Jessica Lynch waves during a parade in her hometown last week.

KRT Photo/Lew Stamp

also stabbed when Iraqi forces closed in on her position, the official said, noting that initial intelligence reports indicated that she had been stabbed to death."

It's a great story. Unfortunately, that's all it is - a story.

An Army investigation of the incident, titled "Attack on the 507th Maintenance Company, 23 March 2003, An Nasiriyah, Iraq," can be found on the Army's Web site (<http://www.army.mil/features/507thMaintCmpy/AttackOnThe507MaintCmpy.pdf>). It provides no evidence that Lynch had either shot an Iraqi soldier, continued to fire at advancing forces until her weapon ran out of ammunition, or that she was ever stabbed or shot. Rather, her injuries were sustained as a result of her vehicle crashing into another unit vehicle that included Shoshana Johnson, the first African-American female POW.

Before the Army report was issued, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and, later, the "Times" of London, disclosed that the "Washington Post" had published a hyped account of Lynch's capture that was at odds with the facts, something the "Post" would acknowledge and correct in subsequent stories.

The paper's ombudsman, Michael Getter, told Amy Goodman on her "Democracy Now" radio program that "...the story should not have been presented in what really did look like a propagandistic-type account."

Speaking with Goodman on that same radio program, Richard Lloyd Perry, a foreign correspondent for the London "Times," said, "When I was in Nasiriyah, this was a week or so ago, I stayed in the General Hospital, principally that's the safest place in town, protected by both Iraqis

as well as a small number of American Marines."

Workers interviewed by Perry said, "There was no resistance at the hospital. The Iraqi soldiers and commanders who had been there, had fled several hours before—really the day before, so these special forces didn't have to fight their way in at all."

None of this hype was Lynch's fault; she deserves our prayers and concerns. So does Shoshana Johnson. And that also goes for the families of the 11 soldiers killed in combat that night.

In war, as we're seeing again, truth becomes the first casualty.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and Black PressUSA.com. He can be reached through his Web site, georgecurry.com.

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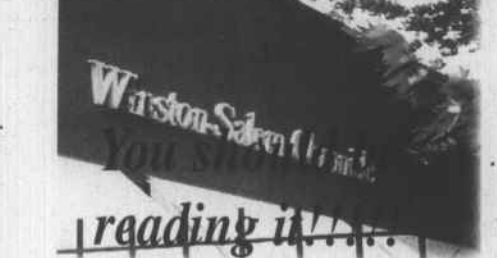


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The Chronicle was established by Ernest Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974, and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc.

The Chronicle is a proud member of National Newspapers Publishers Association • North Carolina Press Association • North Carolina Black Publishers Association • Inland Press Association

National Advertising Representative:
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