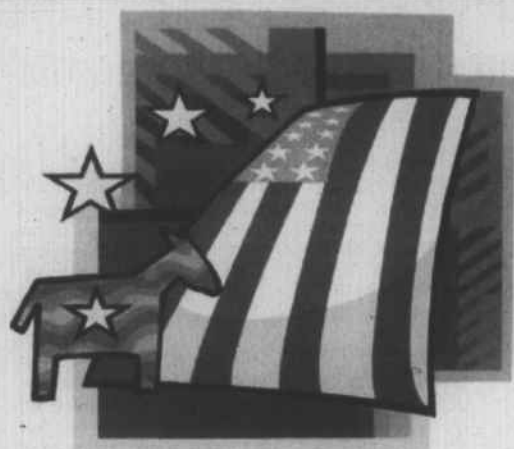
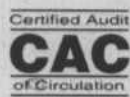
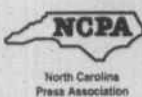


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Some of my good white friends



Val Atkinson
Jones Street

I have several Southern friends who happen to be white Democrats. I've developed an affinity for them because of where their hearts are. They believe in many of the things I believe in; we're just at odds over the "how-to" of it all.

When they talk about the death penalty being unfair, a woman's right to choose, America's unevenhandedness in the Middle East, and America's criminal justice system, my ears perk up and I say, "There's still hope for us all." But in their next breath they're talking about how the current crop of Democratic presidential candidates need to be more like George "Dubya" Bush. It's unbelievable!

Some of these friends of mine seem to be the quintessential faux group leaders. You know, the kind of guy who sees a parade going by, runs and gets out front and declares himself the leader.

Republican presidential candidates have carried North Carolina for six out of the last seven presidential elections. The political tide has changed in North Carolina, but should Democratic values and principles change as well? When was there a debate to determine if the core of the Democratic Party should change? When was it decided (by whom) if the party should move more to the right, more to the left or stay put? Changing from Democratic values to Republican values is not something that should be taken lightly.

N.C. Democratic Party leaders have tried to woo the Democratic registered, Republican voting, white male back to the

fold of the Democratic Party, without success. Since that didn't work, some white Democrats have decided to try to convince the party deserters that Democrats too are for the death penalty, against affirmative action, for school choice, against a woman's right to choose and definitely for the war in Iraq. This is not only losing your way, it's losing your soul.

My question has been: If you give the party deserters everything the Republicans are giving them, why shouldn't they stay where they are? There's no added value in doing a 360 and start voting for Democrats again if all they're going to get is more of the same that's being offered by the Republicans. Many white Democrats in North Carolina started voting Republican when the Democrats embraced the Civil Rights Movement, and they haven't come back yet.

It's going to be difficult for Democrats to continue to stay the course and embrace the values and needs of the party's base while at the same time mounting a war designed to show the party deserters that the party has changed and that they should return.

Sometimes I don't think these white Democratic friends of mine realize how close they are (themselves) to becoming white registered Democrats who vote the straight Republican ticket.

My white Democratic friends have to realize one thing: You can't give up your values and principles just to win an election. If Democrats are going to become knockoffs of the Republican Party, we might as well have one major party in America. And I think we all can agree that that wouldn't be good for either party, nor would it be good for the country.

Val Atkinson is a Triangle-based political adviser and pundit.

Correction

An article in last week's Chronicle gave an incorrect number of children who attended the War Toys Exchange at the William C. Sims Recreation Center. In fact, 300 children attended the event.

Clarification

An article in last week's Chronicle about the Christmas party of District 5 of the N.C. Senior Citizens Clubs Dec. 11 at Rupert Bell Recreation Center did not mention these invited guests who are recreation center officials and also advisers to District 5 of the N.C. Senior Citizens Clubs: Ben Piggott of William C. Sims (Happy Hill), Aaron Baily of Beverly Liggins (Carver) and Robert Little (14th Street). Also present was Denise Scott Johnson, assistant director of parks and recreation.

Also, because of an early deadline as a story of the Christmas holiday, last week's staff editorial and story about Darryl Hunt were printed on Dec. 23, the day before Hunt was released from jail.

Republicans trying to 'fool' blacks



George Curry
Guest Columnist

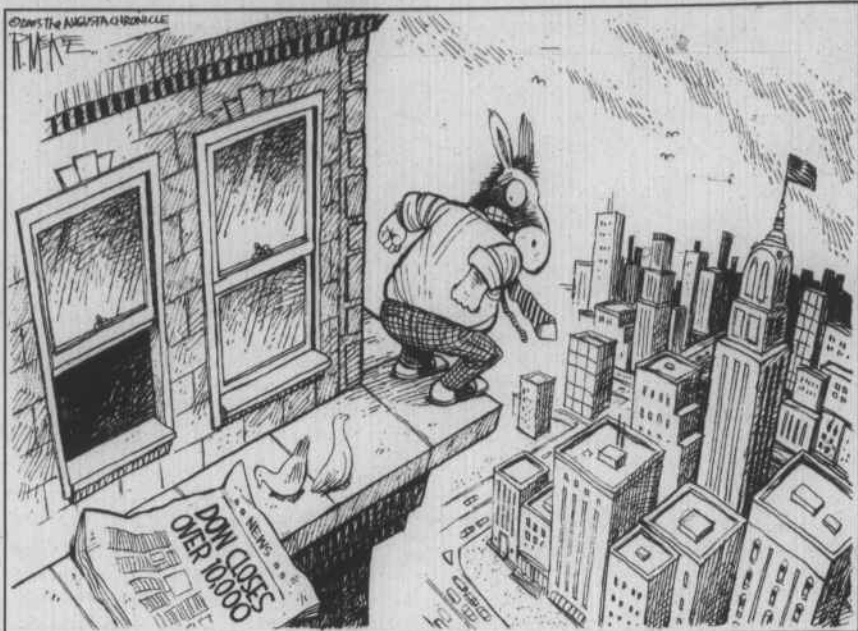
The Republican Party, after receiving only 8 percent of the African-American vote in the 2000 presidential election, has established a goal of winning 25 percent of the black vote in next year's contest. Instead of making that announcement when most people were preparing to make their New Year's resolutions, the GOP should have delayed that announcement for three months. Then it would be clear that this was some sort of April Fool's joke.

What has George Bush done to quadruple his black support? Let's ignore the rhetoric and look at the record.

First, Bush pledged during his 2000 campaign that he would govern as a compassionate conservative. As has been observed, he has been compassionate toward conservatives. For example, most of his tax cuts benefited the wealthy, the majority of whom vote Republican. Meanwhile, Bush did not seek to fully fund his No Child Left Behind education law, he has proposed changes in programs such as Head Start that will be detrimental to black children, and the president has no significant domestic policy that will uplift African-Americans.

Bush had a chance to show some compassion by supporting affirmative action in a pair of University of Michigan cases that came before the Supreme Court in 2003. Instead, Bush ordered his solicitor general to oppose the cases and had the insensitivity to announce his decision on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. That's a strange way of showing compassion.

A conservative Supreme Court — with seven of its nine members appointed by Republican presidents — upheld the concept of affirmative action in the case involving the University of Michigan's Law School. And true to form,



Bush praised the virtues of diversity after the ruling while neglecting to point out that his position would have made that goal more difficult to achieve.

In a move that will make courts of the future more likely to reflect his politics, Bush has packed the federal courts with right-wing judges. One of them, Janice Rogers Brown, is so far out of the mainstream that she is a frequent dissenter on the Republican-controlled California Supreme Court. Bush wants to elevate her to a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. The black conservative is so extreme that the white chief judge in California, also a Republican, says she minimizes the harm of racial discrimination in order to make political points.

Bush has displayed his disdain for black America by meeting only once with members of the Congressional Black Caucus, despite repeated requests for meetings. Like them or not, black members of Congress were fairly elected by voters — and that's more than we can say about Bush. When Bush thumbs his nose at them, he thumbs his nose at all African-Americans.

By disrespecting authentic black leaders, Bush seems to be subscribing to the thinking of Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker. In 1983, Gingrich said, "It is in the interest of the Republican Party and Ronald Reagan to invent new black leaders, so to speak...."

The GOP has "invented" several black front organizations that it is propping up with money. But money can't buy credibility and these groups that oppose affirmative action and favor school vouchers have little, if any, influence on African-American thought.

In one sense, Bush's problem is a GOP problem. Republicans have established a clear record of hostility toward the interests of African-Americans, yet they want to dupe us into believing that they are our friends. That's an insult to our intelligence.

One of the best barometers of legislative support for issues important to black America is the NAACP's annual report card on civil rights. Year after year, it is difficult to find Republicans in the House or Senate who earn a C-grade or higher on civil rights. Most earn D's and F's.

But Bush and the GOP don't want us to get confused by the facts. So they are targeting young black voters they feel are more likely to be receptive to their message; they are planning a barrage of commercials on black radio, ads in black newspapers and parading their black cabinet members before us — all of whom except Colin Powell opposed the University of Michigan affirmative action programs — to say why we should vote for George Bush in 2004. It won't work.

Bush began his administration by putting on a minstrel show in Philadelphia. He should realize that no amount of buck dancing by black entertainers or trying to replace legitimate black leaders with his hand-picked black appointees will blind African-Americans to his sorry record on civil rights.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. His most recent book is "The Best of Emerge Magazine," an anthology published by Ballantine Books. He can be reached through his Web site, georgecurry.com.

Malvo verdict sends right signal



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

The Virginia jury that spared the life of teen sniper Lee Boyd Malvo did the right thing. Malvo's crime was heinous, shocking and brutal, but it was still a crime committed by a deeply troubled, confused and emotionally immature teen influenced by his murderous sidekick, John Allen Muhammad, a delusional, hate-filled adult. The reality is that children don't have the same maturity, judgment or emotional development as adults.

Amnesty International, which calls for the outright ban on all executions of those convicted of crimes as juveniles, found that many child offenders sentenced to death have suffered severe physical or sexual abuse, were alcohol or drug impaired, or suffered from acute mental illness or brain damage. Nearly all were below average intelligence.

Despite Hollywood sensationalism and media-driven myths about rampaging youths, children are not natural-born killers. If given proper treatment, counseling, skills training, and education, most can be turned into productive adults.

Also, teen death penalty cases are deeply riddled with racial bias. More than half of the nearly 100 prisoners convicted of capital crimes as juveniles that currently languish on America's death rows are young blacks or Latinos. Most were convicted of killing whites.

The disgraceful fact is that the United States now stands virtually alone in the world in killing juvenile offenders. Congo, Iran and Pakistan are among the most abominable human rights viola-



Lee Boyd Malvo

tors in the world, and are the only other countries known to have executed juveniles in the past three years. Even China, which executes more persons than any other country, has banned juvenile executions. The American Bar Association, the United Nations, medical associations, human rights groups, and a national commission studying the death penalty that included former FBI director William Sessions and Oklahoma City bombing prosecutor Beth Wilkinson have called for the United States to ban executions of those sentenced to death as juveniles.

More Americans than ever agree that executing juveniles is an outdated and barbaric practice. An ABC News poll taken during Malvo's trial found that an overwhelming majority of the public did not support the death penalty for juveniles. Despite public horror and revulsion at Malvo's crime, the majority still did not back the death penalty for him.

State legislators and courts also agree that teen executions are bad business. In the past year, state legislators in Montana and Indiana barred teen executions. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the annual death-sentencing rate for juvenile offenders has plunged from 15 sentences handed out in 1999 to one in the first nine months of 2003.

Still, despite the sea change in public sentiment and reluctance of many prosecutors and juries to seek the death penalty for teens, and though federal law prohibits the death penalty for teens, President Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft have been stone silent on the injustice of executing juveniles.

This is yet another bad sign that the Bush administration, publicly at least, sees nothing wrong in condemning juveniles to death, and will say and do nothing to urge those states that still permit the execution of juve-

niles to ban the practice.

Then there's the Supreme Court. Last year the high court blew a golden opportunity to once and for all put an end to teen executions when it refused to hear the case of a Kentucky man who killed as a 17-year-old. But there is a glimmer of hope that that may soon change. Four justices vigorously dissented in the case and called teen executions a "shameful practice." And at least one or two of the court's hardliners that said no to banning teen executions may soon join them. In fact, they took one big step in that direction when they voted last year to ban the execution of the mentally retarded. They relented after the well-publicized executions of prisoners with childishly low IQs or devastating mental disorders had ignited public outrage, shame, and embarrassment.

Despite the justices' loud protest that politics and public opinion play no role in their bench rulings, the justices, like good politicians, do read newspapers and watch television. They are fully cognizant of changing shifts in public attitudes, and more often than not their decisions filter into law and public policy. Public opinion had decidedly shifted from consent to disapproval of executing the mentally retarded, and that is fast changing on teen executions.

Though the death penalty for juveniles is on the books in nearly 20 states, Virginia is only one of six states that have ever actually executed juvenile killers. The jury's decision that Malvo will not be one of those executed sent the right signal that other teens must be spared too.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and columnist. Visit his news and opinion Web site: www.thehutchinsonreport.com. He is the author of "The Crisis in Black and Black" (Middle Passage Press).