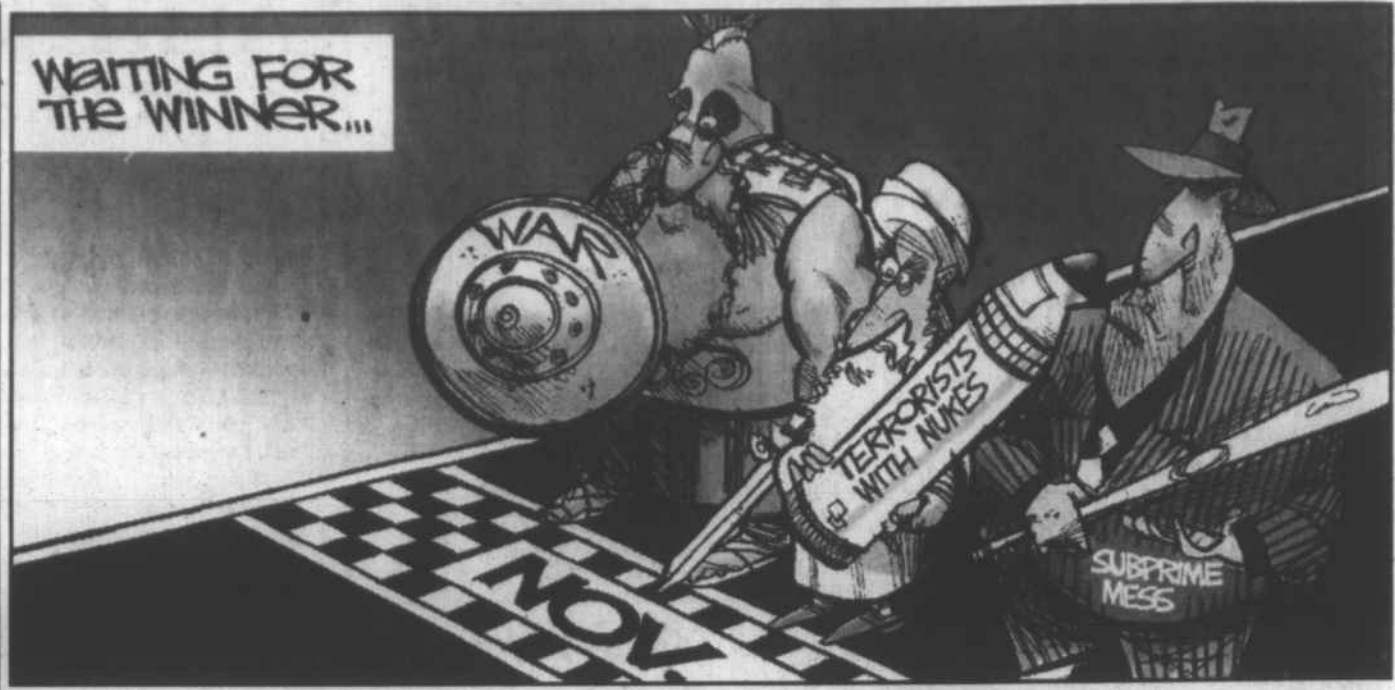
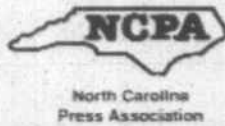


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Obama Hits a Triple



Ron Walters
 Guest Columnist



By all accounts, Barack Obama won the first of the presidential debates on September 26 over John McCain, who was widely considered to have more experience in foreign affairs.

He won by exceeding expectations, exhibiting that he had a substantial grasp of issues and that he was presidential, while McCain talked in generalities and showed his disdain for Obama, not according him proper acknowledgment by refusing to look at him.

But whatever advantage McCain was thought to have over Obama by his familiarity with various heads of state and, as he intoned, having been involved in every major crisis in foreign policy in the past 25 years, Obama came back several times, diminishing McCain's winning points.

For example, when McCain alluded to the fact that he had a bracelet from a woman whose son had been killed in Iraq, Obama countered with his own bracelet, squelching McCain's emotional point. When McCain charged that Obama didn't understand the "Surge," Obama countered that McCain seemed to think the war began in 2007, then dramatically stated since the war began in 2003, McCain

had been wrong about the reason for its start, wrong about how American troops would be received, and wrong about the tension between Sunni and Shia factions. And there were others.

Nevertheless, it was also somewhat unnerving to hear him say at least seven times that McCain was right; for him not to counter McCain's repeated message that Obama didn't understand, to see McCain muscle him out of responses several times because Jim Lehrer was not in control of the debate; to see him not follow up on several obvious openings such as his definition of the "success" of the Surge, McCain's slavish support of George Bush's policies, McCain's lack of support for Veterans, and others.

I understand the problem he has. On one hand, he can't feed into the "angry black man" racial image and turn off some white voters; on the other, he has to establish a level of policy competence and physical ease that lets him appear presidential. But I give him a triple

because he could have been much better.

Then next evening, however, when Barack Obama stepped on the stage to give the keynote speech at Congressional Black Caucus annual dinner, the fact that he was home could be witnessed by everybody who was on their feet, rocking to the music of, "Here I am, baby, signed sealed delivered, I'm yours...."

Obama was given the CBC's Harold Washington Award, named after the former mayor of his home City and he proceeded to acknowledge those who had paved his way—again, leaving out Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. who sat at a table in front of him.

But as Obama got into his speech and began to warm up, he answered the criticism of me and others, by dealing with critical aspects of the Black Agenda.

Time and again, he brought the crowd to its feet by observing that this historical moment was not just about him, but about the children who might benefit and who might live to

actually see a black person in the White House. He defined change with his stock presentation on issues like ending the Iraq war, enacting health adequate insurance and health care, and ending the failed No Child Left Behind education program. He also linked shoring up inadequate schools in poor neighborhoods to college attendance and good jobs.

Most importantly, he showed that he was conversant with the problems of urban America, pointing to the need to deal with poverty, promoting job training and ending mass incarceration by rolling back punitive legislation. And he felt that we should not only be "tough on crime," but smart on crime. Gone was the patronizing language of moral responsibility as the only solution. This was not only good for the audience to hear assembled there, but it was fuel for the fundraising that he and Michele were doing in town, and for the message of a strong black turnout that rippled through the CBC forums all week long.

So, I give Obama a Home Run for his performance at the CBC and feel that he has not only put many of the questions raised to rest, he also teed up a number of issues he will bring to the table in the debates on domestic issues.

Dr. Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar and Professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland College Park.



Courtney Taylor's school has been closed down for now.

City Leaders: Stand Up for the Little Guys

The plight of Courtney Taylor has us scratching our head. The young, talented dancer has been in a tug of war with the city over the fate of her dance school. Dozens of kids are taught and nurtured at the school, which has done much to live up to its promise of promoting "positive images." Besides learning dance moves, the girls are taught to respect themselves. They gain confidence through performing and being in front audiences.

Taylor, a native of Kernersville, has long been a faithful member of this community, providing entertainment for myriad local events with her crop of talented students, and serving on committees and boards across the city.



David Moore

With credentials like this, we don't understand why Mayor Joines and every member of the City Council, especially the black ones, aren't calling on city inspectors to bend over backward to ensure that this young woman continues to do the awesome work that has become her trademark. Isn't this what we elect our leaders to do: to stand up for us, to speak out for us? It would take just one phone call from the mayor or a Council Member to help this young lady, who may have to find another location for her dance school.

Sadly, this is not the first time that this paper has reported on a young, ambitious African-American who has collided with city building inspectors. David Moore, whose Southside Rides Foundation keeps young men out of prison, had to fight with the city to continue his work. Apparently, city officials and silent city leaders, would rather see the young people that Moore trains in auto-body repair in jail or on our streets drugging, raping and robbing.

To us, it is a no-brainer. When you have people trying to do good, they should be supported to the max. We don't buy that there is no gray area. Moore and Taylor can provide a safe, zoning appropriate environment in which to continue their work. Even if it means inspectors have to hold their hands through the process, the payoff is well worth it.

While we concede that not all of Taylor's and Moore's problems stem from the city, we feel the powers that be have done little to aid them in their efforts to do positive work in our community.

Entrepreneurship and small businesses are the beating heart of this community, and they should be treated like such. Unfortunately in this city, despite all the talk to the contrary, the big, deep-pocketed boys still are getting their way. If Taylor and Moore were a developer of one of those multi-million dollar office or apartment buildings downtown, they would not be getting this kind of treatment. Inspectors and city leaders would be crawling over one another to accommodate them.

The Road to Race-Free Politics



Marian Wright Edelman
 Guest Columnist

A cartoon published in the early 1960s depicted a Black boy saying to a White boy: "I'll sell you my chance to be President of the United States for a nickel."

The cartoon summed up how much most Black people felt the chances of a Black child growing up to be President were worth. At the time the cartoon appeared, Barack Obama was a toddler. There were only five Black Members of Congress and about 300 Black elected officials nationwide.

The Voting Rights Act hadn't been passed and the overwhelming majority of Black Southerners were disenfranchised. It was difficult for anyone to visualize a time when a Black person would be elected to the highest office in the land.

That changed. With the nomination of Illinois Senator Barack Obama as the Democratic Party's standard bearer for the 2008 presidential campaign, there's a good chance that a Black man may occupy the Oval Office in the White House this January.

This historic nomination is the culmination of a long evolutionary struggle for Black political empowerment that reached a high point when the Civil Rights Movement

pressed Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965. That led to the dramatic expansion of the Black electorate. Black people began to fill a broad range of elected posts at every level of government: from sheriff to school board, from mayor to state legislator and on to higher offices such as U.S. Representative, Senator and Governor.

With the power of the ballot, Black voters have achieved major electoral gains throughout our nation. In 2002, there were 9,470 Black elected officials in the United States according to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. The Old Confederacy states of Mississippi and Alabama had 950 and 757 Black elected officials respectively in a broad variety of positions. The 41 Black members of the U.S. House of Representatives have nearly approached parity in that body compared with the percentage of Black people in the U.S. population.

The growth of a Black presence in America's political realm has helped Black elected leaders gain acceptance among the general public. Sen. Obama garnered nearly 18 million votes in this year's primary elections. Americans of all races have looked past his skin color to consider his presidential candidacy on the basis of his vision of inclusive change as a way to move the nation forward as well as his intelligence and political experience.

The question remains, however: Have we arrived at a

post-racial era where the election of the President can take place on a "colorblind" basis? Regrettably, race remains a factor in American politics. It is still difficult for Black candidates to win statewide offices—Governor or U.S. Senator—which are threshold positions for a run for the White House. Barack Obama is currently the only Black Senator in Congress and only the fifth Black person to hold that office. And over the history of our nation, there have been only four Black governors.

Candidates for these offices face what may be a daunting campaign appealing to a majority White electorate, a significant component of which may not be open to voting for a Black person. A recent Associated Press-Yahoo News poll revealed deep-seated racial misgivings among some Whites toward Blacks and found that one-third of White Democrats harbor negative views toward Blacks—calling them "lazy," "violent," responsible for their own troubles. The poll indicated that these attitudes could affect the outcome of the Presidential election in a close contest.

There is too much at stake in this election to vote against a candidate simply because a nebulous voice deep in one's psyche may be saying America isn't ready for a Black President.

The next occupant of the White House will set our nation's priorities for the next four years and beyond. But we cannot move forward without dealing with the issue of race.

Barack Obama says: "The legacy of discrimination—and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past—are real and must be addressed, not just with words, but with deeds, by investing in our schools and our communities; by enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system; by providing this generation with ladders of opportunity that were unavailable for previous generations...." He adds that "Investing in the health, welfare and education of Black and Brown and White children will ultimately help all of America prosper."

The struggle to ensure that our political, economic and social interactions take place on a level playing field began when the Founding Fathers signed the Declaration of Independence asserting that "all men are created equal." President Abraham Lincoln exhorted the nation to expand that precept in the Gettysburg Address with the hope that the United States would have a "new birth of freedom." We've come a long way.

But, as Barack Obama says: We must "continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America," and ultimately achieve a more perfect union.

Marian Wright Edelman is head of the Children's Defense Fund.
<http://www.childrensdefense.org/>