

OP/ED

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Christie Distorts Civil Rights History

Marc Morial
Guest Columnist

"No minority should have their rights subject to the passions and sentiments of the majority. This is the fundamental bedrock of what our nation stands for."

- Newark Mayor Cory Booker

In recent weeks, outrageous statements targeted at minority citizens have come out of the mouths of a number of conservative politicians - everything from the assertion that African Americans prefer food stamps over pay checks to the claim that "black people" are using "other people's money" to get ahead.

But last week, Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey may have topped them all when he declared, "People would have been happy to have a referendum on civil rights rather than fighting and dying in the streets in the South." The Governor's statement was made in the context of his proposal that the issue of same-sex marriage in New Jersey be settled by a voter referendum. But his words amounted to an insult to generations of men and women who put their lives on the line for equal rights. They also ignore the fact that the sole purpose of any civil rights struggle is to gain rights for minority citizens that the majority has historically and consistently denied.

The nonsense of Christie's statement was made all the more apparent by the fact that during the heyday



Chris Gov. Christie (left) with Mitt Romney, whom he has endorsed for president.

of lynchings, poll taxes and "separate but equal schools," any referendum on voting rights and civil rights for African Americans would have excluded many of the very people seeking those rights. In fact it was only because the majority for centuries had first enslaved and then discriminated against African Americans that it became necessary for people of conscience to organize in protest against such treatment. Christie should remember that in the 18th Century, it was not a referendum, but a revolution that formed the United States of America. In the 19th Century, it was not a referendum, but a civil war that ended slavery and unified our nation. And in the 20th Century, it was not a referendum, but a series of non-violent civil rights struggles that defeated Jim Crow and secured voting rights for women, African Americans and other disenfranchised minorities.

Sheila Oliver, New Jersey's first African American woman Assembly Speaker, correctly saw Christie's proposal to submit same-sex marriage rights to the whims of voters as a shirking of responsibility. She said, "The major issues

of our time, such as women's suffrage and civil rights, were rightly decided legislatively. We are elected by the people of New Jersey to protect civil rights. We do not pass on such tough decisions."

Oliver also took issue with Christie's characterization of the civil rights struggle, adding, "Governor, people were fighting and dying in the streets of the South because the majority refused to grant minorities equal rights by any method. It took legislative action to bring justice to all Americans, just as legislative action is the right way to bring marriage equality to all New Jerseyans."

It is almost unthinkable that a sitting governor would either be so uninformed, or so callous to suggest that civil rights movements have not played a necessary and positive role in ensuring that the promise of freedom, equality and democracy is made real for every citizen. We think the governor owes the people of New Jersey and all Americans a clear explanation.

Marc H. Morial is the President and CEO of the National Urban League.

The Women in Black History

Julianne Malveaux
Guest Columnist

I am grateful and appreciative of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the man who claimed Negro History Week, which later changed to Black History Month. From a week to a month, but we need to rock the year, every year, because there are so many opportunities to celebrate Black History. The organization that Dr. Woodson founded, the Association for the Study of African American Life and Heritage (ASAALH) organizes a theme each year, and this year the theme is women.

Part of me fusses. Gender needs always to be threaded through conversations about the African American experience. When we think of history, men's names drip off our lips - Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr. Much less frequently do we think of women like Ida B. Wells, Dr. Sadie Alexander, Mary Ellen Pleasant, Fannie Lou Hamer, so many others. Yet these women are the marrow of the bone of our history. These women are the beacons of our world.

Why do we so ignore women's contributions? History belongs to she who holds the pen. Too often, women want to lift our men up. What about lifting ourselves up? I speak to this from the vantage point of being president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro. I cheer whenever I hear of the four phenomenal black men who sat at a Woolworth's counter on February 1, 1960,



Rep. Lee

protesting segregation. I chafe when Bennett College women are left out of the story. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth is that Bennett women were as much a part of the protest. The patriarchy of the 1960s would not allow women to sit at the counter. Our brothers, always chivalrous, would not expose women to the lighted matches, drizzled catsup, or other harassment that angry whites directed on them. Still, if we tell the whole story, we have to tell the women's story. Too often, the stories are buried by expedient headlines.

We have to tell the stories for our mothers, to honor them, and for our daughters, to inspire them. There should never, ever be the sense that women are at the periphery of history. We need to tell the stories of the living - like bold Congresswoman Maxine Waters, and stories of those who have made their transition - like the revolutionary Fannie Lou Hamer. We have to tell stories that reflect the diversity of our styles. All of us are not bold and bodacious. Some achieve demurely and quietly, like the 10th President of Bennett, Dr. Willa B. Player, who is said to have never spoken louder than a whisper.

Yet, this demure woman was the only person in Greensboro who had the courage to invite Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the city. No rabbi, no Baptist minister, no other college president would welcome Dr. King in 1958. The NAACP invited him, but they struggled to find a place for King to speak. Dr. Player famously said, "We teach our students how to think, not what to think," and she proffered the invitation, braving disapproval. I cannot imagine the courage it took, in the South, when she depended on white philanthropists, to invite the then-controversial Dr. King. She didn't mind. She did it anyway. That's women's history, something for our young women to savor; the notion that right is not always popular.

During this Black History Month, let's sing a song for sisters. For Elsie Scott, who leads the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. For Melanie Campbell, who leads the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation. For Barbara Lee, the Oakland Congresswoman who has been fearless in her support for economic justice. For Maggie Lena Walker, the Richmond woman who was the first black woman to start a bank. For Marianne Spraggins, the first black woman to be a managing director on Wall Street. Sing a song for sisters, for those well known and those unknown. We are the backbone of African American history, and our song is one that must be sung, trilled, placed into crescendo. When we sing our sister song, we empower and uplift each other.

Dr. Julianne Malveaux is President of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro.



HYPE members are hyped about this weekend's event.

Dancing

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take the genre to the next level by staging the first-ever "Look of Love Affair" at the Metropolis Event Center in Winston-Salem. Slated for Feb. 11, the event will showcase groups from North Carolina, Georgia, Maryland and Virginia.

Will Baker, the co-founder of the Virginia-based Toasted Up Productions, will be serving as both a performer and instructor at the Look of Love Affair.

"This is line dance family, and it's for a good cause, so we're there," said the Kinston native, whose company hosts monthly line dancing socials in Manassas, Va., where he now resides.

Baker, a retired Army serviceman, will be leading a routine he created to Usher's hit song, "Okay." The self-described "line dancing junkie" said the art form is the perfect outlet for dancers young and old.

"With line dancing, no matter what your age, you can still move," related the 53 year-old. "It'll help your health, and you don't need a partner. You can line dance by yourself."

In addition to entertainment, the Look of Love Affair will provide city residents an opportunity to find out what soul dancing is all about, said Matthews, a mother of two.

"Soul line dancing is not a very popular thing in the Triad and in North Carolina. My desire is to make people aware of it and to find out how much fun it is," she stated. "The line dance community is a good, strong community, a positive community. That's the reason why I'm so passionate about it."

Matthews, a Parkland alumna and owner of Sweet Dreams Childcare, discovered soul line dancing at a workshop four years ago and says she's been hooked ever since. She joined Encore, a local soul line dancing group, and after a year of dancing was invited to lead a class at the W.R. Anderson Recreation Center.

"It started growing by leaps and bounds," she said of the class, whose participants range in age from eight to 70. "I was so surprised by the response."

Some of the members of the class got together to form the HYPE, (Hip-Hop-Youthful-Performing-Extraordinaires) crew last year. The Look of Love Affair, which will feature both line dancing and free dancing rooms and heavy hors d'oeuvres, will serve as a fundraiser for the group, which hopes to take their show on the road in the coming year, Matthews said. HYPE may also use some of the proceeds to sponsor community-oriented events such as line dancing socials in the future, said Matthews, whose 20 year-old son Tyke Matthews serves as one of her co-instructors.

"The one thing I can say that may be different about HYPE is that HYPE wants to be a community-based group," she commented. "We



The Symmetry in Motion crew of Alexandria, Va. will travel to town to strut its stuff.



Carla Matthews gives instructions on Tuesday.

want to do different things to support the community, to help the community and just use line dancing as a catalyst to get other things done."

She believes that those who come out for the Look of Love Affair will be glad they made the trip.

"I promise them they will not regret it," she declared. "They will have a

ball. It's good, clean fun. That's the best thing about it. It's clean fun."

The look of Love Affair will be held on Feb. 11 from 8 p.m. until 1 a.m. at Metropolis Event Center 3025 Wroughton Street in Love Affair will be glad they made the trip. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door. For more information or to purchase tickets, contact Matthews at 995-7499 or email hypecrew@gmail.com.

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