

## Christmas and college sports: Who owns them?

What do big-time college sports have in common with Christmas? It is a question of ownership.

Every year, the holiday season seems to bring new ways for people to argue about how others are trying to take Christmas away for "us," raising the question, who owns Christmas?



D.G. MARTIN

Last year, I wrote about how some religious and political leaders had criticized the use of terms like "holiday" and "season's greetings" when they are used in place of "Christmas" in advertising and greeting cards. Some of them urged us to boycott businesses that were not using "Christmas" in their holiday ads.

But the threat to the real Christmas is not the failure to use the "Christmas" term in connection with the orgy of holiday sales, parties, and parades. The real danger is the surrender of the religious holy day to a holiday season that has less and less to do with its religious origins.

Even the non-commercial aspects of the season have become so divorced from religion, that some atheists embrace the celebration, as reported in a recent New York Times article, "The Grinch Delusion: An Atheist Can Believe in Christmas" by Randy Kennedy.

The article quotes Sam Harris, a best-selling author and defender of atheism, "It seems to me to be obvious that everything we value in Christmas — giving gifts, celebrating the holiday with our families, enjoying all of the kitsch that comes along with it — all of that has been entirely appropriated by the secular world."

Last year I urged that those who wanted to protect the "real Christmas" should distance their observances from the other winter holiday activities. If they, for instance, owned the "Christmas" trademark, like Disney owns "Mickey Mouse" and Coca-Cola owns "Coke" they should restrict the use of that term to religious observances relating to the celebration of the birth of Jesus and rejecting all commercial "exploitation" of the term. Of course, nothing of the sort is going to happen.

Too many "Christians" have bought into the commercial and secular holiday. Many of us have important economic interests in Christmas as we know it. This kind of Christmas has so wrapped itself around our culture that Santa Claus is as sacred as the Christ Child and "Jingle Bells" is as holy as "O Holy Night."

Puritans like me urge that we break away from nonreligious activities of Christmas. But, if we got what we ask for, there would be a big problem. If Christmas were simply a religious holy day, if it had to stand without the support of the traditions of the secular festivities, would it give the Christian religion the same boost that Christmas gives it?

The holiday, with all of its faults, is a blitz marketing time for Christians. The institutional advertising from Christmas is better than hundreds of thirty-second ads on a Super Bowl broadcast, in terms of building the brand and gathering support. Christmas the way we celebrate it may not be pure Christianity, but today's Christianity probably cannot do without it. Nothing to brag about to be sure, but it's come to that. Here is where the connection to big-time college sports comes in.

Although it is hard to rationalize the partnership between the multimillion dollar sports business that is connected to our great colleges and universities, there is no doubt that much of the support for many of those institutions has become dependent on success in the sports business.

The bread and butter service of universities is to do groundbreaking research, to serve their communities, and to prepare students to succeed. Puritans like me can argue all day long that big-time sports complicate and compromise these efforts. The power of the sports establishments in universities gives them incredible independence and separation from university governance. The universities that are identified with them no longer really own them.

But the universities cannot do without them. The attention and the broad based loyalty that sports teams have brought their universities have been critical to building the support that American universities get from government and private donors.

It is not pretty and it is hard to defend or even explain. There is really nothing like it.

Except, perhaps, Christmas.

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## America's 'surge' in wasted sacrifice in Iraqi quagmire

By Eugene Robinson  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Here's an idea: Let's send more U.S. troops to Iraq. The generals say it's way too late to even think about resurrecting Colin Powell's "overwhelming force" doctrine, so let's send over a modest "surge" in troop strength that has almost no chance of making any difference — except in the casualty count. Oh, and let's not give these soldiers and Marines any sort of well-defined mission. Let's just send them out into the

bloody chaos of Baghdad and the deadly badlands of Anbar province with orders not to come back until they "get the job done."

I don't know about you, but that strikes me as a terrible idea, arguably the worst imaginable "way forward" in Iraq. So of course this seems to be where George W. Bush is headed.

Don't assign any real significance to the fact that the president has decided to wait until the new year before announcing his next step in

## Are you ready to bring back black?

I know I am. I am ready to connect with brothers and sisters who are unwavering and unapologetic when it comes to who they are and what their obligation is to our people. I am ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with black folks who are unafraid and unflappable when attacked from without and from within.

I am ready to work with a new cadre of black leaders, not new in experience but new as it relates to their current unused status, their active youth status, and new in respect to what they have done and are doing "under the radar screen" so to speak. There are many "new" leaders out there, and I am ready to follow them as we Bring Back Black.

The new book by W.D. Wright, *The Crisis of the Black Intellectual*, which I highly recommend you read, contains the following passage on page 311. (Get your copy from Third World Press, Chicago.)

"Today there is no general black leadership and the black political body is fragmented isolated, individualistic, fanciful, delusional, susceptible to posturing, and has no real sense of engaging with black politics that are designed to help black people in America, specifically those millions still 'stuck at the bottom.' What could interrupt this situation and force blacks back to a general leadership and to a consciousness of black politics would be the emergence of new and differently oriented local black leaders. This would include some individuals drawn from those 'stuck at the bottom.'"

There are enough black local leaders, community organizers, and activists who could initiate this new and different leadership across the country and who could consciously and actively seek to recruit and train individuals up from varied misery for local leadership."

The weekend of December 8, 2006 was the first step on a journey some of us have taken before. It was the weekend when strong, dedicated, determined, and consciously black brothers and sisters gathered to begin the Bring Back Black movement. We came together because we know W.D. Wright is correct in his assessment of black leadership. We came together to find one another, to meet one another, to connect with one another, to support one another, and to work with one another.

The Bring Back Black gathering comprised stalwart and resolute black folks, some of who have been working for decades empowering our people. No need to name them; they are not looking for the spotlight. No need to number them; they are not looking for accolades. This group, as well as those who wanted to be there but could not, simply works to overcome the psychological barriers that now prevent black people from moving forward together as well as individually.

They do their work quietly and without fanfare, in the same manner that Frederick Douglass described Harriet Tubman and the work she did. They work by building their own businesses, opening their own schools, and being serious about their political involvement. They do their work by meeting payrolls from which their black employees take care of their families. They do it by standing up and speaking out against injustice and inequity. They do it by sacrificing their time and their resources for the collective cause of black people. That's why they came to the Bring Back Black gathering, which was held in the city Kwesi Mfume called "ground zero," Cincinnati.

I want to publicly state my gratitude to all who came, and those who could not, for your trust and confidence in me. Yes, I made the call, but you came, and it was all of you who made our gathering a milestone in the annals of our history in this country. It was you, all of us, who have etched a new thought into the minds of our people, a thought that if nurtured and promoted, will surely take root and spring up as the movement we have searched for during the past 40 years.

In the 1960s we had the Black Power Movement, in which our songs, our products, our language, our clothing, our hair, our gestures, and our love of self, displayed a new thought, a new resolve, and a new dedication. What happened to it? Those were the first stages of what could have been a most powerful movement for Black people. The remnants are still with us, but the substance of collective progressiveness and prosperity are far lacking.

Shortly after Martin Luther King's death, it seems black folks were more susceptible to being bought off; they were more pliable and, thus, easy targets for political and social program positions and handouts. During that period, in which strong, fist-in-the-air, black men and women capitulated to the temptations of betrayal, we heard the death knell of our movement. It was sad to see strong black voices silenced by the lure of "jobs" "grants" "sponsorships" and appointments to "Advisory Boards." But to many in 1960's, I suppose, it beat the alternative of being ostracized like Tommy Smith and John Carlos were, or even murdered like Fred Hampton was.

So what do we do now? We seek and follow new leadership; we take more control of our children's education; we get serious about politics by playing to win rather than just playing to play; we take better care of our bodies; we use technology and commercial media, to its fullest, to tell our own story, because he who defines you controls you; we connect with our brothers and sisters in Africa, in Haiti, Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands, and in Brazil's Bahia, and in London, and throughout the world. And finally, but importantly, we pool some of our money and invest in our own projects.

Those are the things we did at our Bring Back Black meeting. Now, I ask you again: Are you ready to Bring Back Black?

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## Xavier University president in pursuit of better society

Xavier University's Norman Francis, the longest-serving college president in the nation, was recently chosen to receive the highest honor granted a civilian — the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Few Americans deserve this honor as much as Dr. Francis, who in 2005 was recognized by the National Urban League as a living legend at our annual conference in Washington, D.C.

His commitment to the education of African Americans in the fields of pharmacology, science and pre-med is unparalleled. Xavier, one of the first and longest-standing participants in our Black Executive Exchange Program, graduates more black pharmacists, scientists and aspiring doctors than any institution nationwide. The university has accounted for roughly one-quarter of black pharmacists practicing in the United States and more future African-American doctors than any other undergraduate school.

"These are the sorts of things that happen in one's lifetime that you never expect," Dr. Francis told the New Orleans Times Picayune recently. "I accept it for all the people who made this possible, whose shoulders I'm standing on and who helped me be encouraged to work hard and to serve the career that I chose. They all are part of this award. It's not for me alone."

The parents of Dr. Francis, born in Lafayette, La. in 1931, knew their son was destined to go places. They did all they could to send him to St. Paul Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Though a barber and homemaker of modest means, they made great sacrifices to give their son the best education possible.

And Dr. Francis more than delivered on his promise, first earning a B.S. from Xavier in 1952 and then a J.D. from Loyola University Law School, where he was the first black student. He couldn't stay in the dorms at Loyola because he was black so he lived at his alma mater, serving as dean of men until 1956 when he joined the U.S. Army's Third Armored Division. He returned to his old job and in 1963 then he was promoted to director of student personnel services. By 1968, Dr. Francis took the helm of nation's only historically black Catholic university.

Over his nearly 40-year tenure, Xavier grew at an unprecedented clip. The campus became known as Emerald City for its lavish green landscaping and housed a \$15-million library; a 430-bed, \$13 million dorm and a \$23-million science complex, including a school of pharmacy. From 1999 to 2005, enrollment increased 35 percent to more than 4,000 students, and 470 graduates were accepted to medical schools. But in August of 2005, Hurricane Katrina changed everything. Not only was the first floor of Dr. Francis' house reduced to "nothing but studs and walls" but the university he led sustained major water and wind damage, he told Tavis Smiley in 2005.

Floods resulting from breached levees in Katrina's aftermath rushed in, deluging the Xavier campus and damaging every single building. That five years earlier Congress had passed legislation exempting private colleges and universities from Federal Emergency Management Administration aid didn't help matters much. Xavier, which has a small endowment and whose students depend heavily on government aid, faced footing the bill for its own Katrina recovery.

But that didn't deter Dr. Francis. He not only brought his university back to working order he answered the call of his state by accepting the chairmanship of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. In this capacity, he has figured prominently in efforts to help Gulf Coast residents rebuild their lives in Katrina's wake.

Dr. Francis championed the notion that New Orleans could be restored not only to its former but a greater glory, challenging those who advocated shrinking the city's footprint after the storm. "One thing that you can't kill is the spirit and the dedication that people have and we got a lot of people who are dedicated to making this a different state and every city a different place. We hope to use this opportunity to make this state and our cities better than what they once were. It's not going to be easy," he told Tavis Smiley in 2005.

Xavier's president has received commendation from countless prominent figures, including Nelson Mandela, President Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Jesse Jackson and Pope John Paul II and has acquired numerous honorary degrees. He joins the late John "Buck" O'Neil, who up until his death served as the Negro Leagues' chief historian and also became the first black coach in the major leagues, the great B.B. King, literacy crusader Ruth Johnson Colvin, historian and journalist Paul Johnson and Nobel Prize-winning scientist Joshua Lederberg, in receiving the medal. Previous winners include Bill Cosby, Hank Aaron and Pearl Bailey.

Iraq, because if history is any guide, all of this photo-op "consultation" he's doing is just for show — to convince us, or maybe to convince himself, that he has an open mind. The Decider doesn't have the capacity for indecision.

Through Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, he has ruled out direct talks with Iran and Syria to try to enlist their cooperation in quelling Iraq's sectarian civil war. Through his own remarks, he has ruled out a firm timetable for a U.S. withdrawal. He has declared himself open to any and all advice, but he rules out any course of action that in his estimation will "lead to defeat."

So much for the Iraq Study Group. So much for the will of the voters. As Dick Cheney helpfully spelled out just before the election, "full speed ahead."

At least the Decider is consistent. From the start his administration's approach to this botched war has been to sort through all the tactical alternatives and pick the most counterproductive — send too few troops, disband the Iraqi army, stand by while looters destroy critical infrastructure and the social order, allow sectarian militias to fill the power vacuum, make reconstruction an afterthought, and put know-nothings in charge of it.

There are more than 140,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, and it's unclear what they are supposed to be accomplishing. It should be obvious that

to establish security in all of Iraq and disarm the sectarian militias — to conduct a proper occupation, in other words — would require a massive infusion of boots on the ground. The Pentagon says that finding even an additional 20,000 to 30,000 troops to send would be a stretch, and officials warn (perhaps a little melodramatically) of the danger that the demands of Bush's war "will break" the U.S. Army.

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