

Obama drama: Sleeping pill for black people

Here we go again. Will the euphoria sweeping through our ranks over the possibility of a black president eventually dominate our collective psyche? Will it overwhelm us with notions of "equality" and "victory," and ostensibly cause us to subordinate our primary interests and abandon the pressing issues that negatively impact black life in America? With more than 21 months to go before we vote and one year before the first primaries and caucuses, black folks are spending a great deal of time and resources following each episode of the Obama Drama. Been there, done that.

We were excited when Jesse Jackson ran; more so when it seemed white folks liked him too and even said they would vote for him. But when Jesse made his infamous faux pas and Jewish folks came out against him, the proverbial fat lady started tuning up, "cause it was all over but the shouting.

The next potential black prez was Jesse Junior. He was "articulate," they would say, just like George W. Bush recently labeled Obama. Jesse Junior was "likeable," young, a new breed of politician, and many said they would vote for him for president. That honeymoon didn't last long, either.

And then Harold Ford comes along, the second coming of JFK. He said all the right things on both sides of the aisle, at least for a moment, until he started alienating some of his CBC members by siding with George W. and the GOP more and more. Well, you saw what they did to him in Tennessee with a simple, "Hey Harold, call me."

On the opposite side of the political spectrum there were Colin Powell, Ken Blackwell and Michael Steele, who were not treated very well by their party, either. I know this doesn't mean Obama will be subjected to the same treatment, but you have to admit, it's very likely, especially if he fails to parrot the "politically corporate" line of a "colorblind society." The right-wing fanatics are already lobbing verbal grenades at him. And since we are all so afraid of the Jewish people, heaven forbid they start a campaign against his middle name, as some of the right have already begun doing. It's really over then, folks.

Unlike whites in this country, millions of who will benefit no matter who is president, black people do not have the luxury of devoting the majority of our time and resources to yet another "most important election of our time," especially at this early stage of the game. Besides, it's money time right now, and Obama needs to raise some serious "jack" to compete in this game. So if you're not sending a check, you're not on the radar screen anyway.

We must not allow the Obama Drama to divert our attention from the important things black people need to do for ourselves, now, prior to November 2008. Besides, as far as money is concerned, I am sure Oprah will be handling that for the senator. With all the money she has to support her statement of doing whatever it takes to get him elected, Obama will be in high cotton. So the rest of us should pool our money and try to free our people, because Oprah ain't gonna help us with that.

In October 2004, I wrote an article in which I said, "Barack Obama, the Tiger Woods of politics, the new fair-haired child, has recently been designated as the probable first black president. Some people say Obama 'transcends race' because he is not the 'stereotypical black man.'" One white commentator said, "He is not black in the usual way. What in the world does that mean? Does it mean that he is light-skinned and doesn't seem too threatening? Does it mean he is biracial?"

The article went on to say, "Obama is certainly an excellent candidate for the Senate, but let's not fall for the game, brothers and sisters. If he is deemed safe by white folks, then what label have they hung on the rest of our Black politicians? Besides, even Obama, [even if he does win] will not set us free. That's our job."

Yes, I would like to see a President Obama, but for reasons other than euphoria and emotionalism, his senatorial voting record notwithstanding. I would like to see the impossibility of finally having a president that would speak up as a Black man and actually do something that directly benefits Black people, the people to whom this country owes a tremendous debt. (Hey, I can dream, can't I?)

Of course it doesn't really matter to the corporate hidden hands if the winner is black, white, male, or female; politics is about self-interest, and their interests will be met. My interest is in Black people finally getting something more than rhetoric and a good feeling of seeing a black-skinned person in political office. That's played out for me; black on the outside does not necessarily mean black on the inside; and in politics, unfortunately, we only find out what politicians will do after they win office - too late.

The laudacity of hope is not enough for Black people to make the progress necessary to secure a bright future for our children. We must have the audacity of collective work, sacrifice, courage, strength, under-girded by the audacity of a Black consciousness, the state of mind that will manifest itself in true freedom for our people.

Don't go for the smile and firm handshake from any politician. Read, research, and be informed. Then make up your mind about who can and will do something positive for Black people as president or in any other political position. Don't get side-tracked by the Obama Drama; it's a sleeping pill. We must stay awake; there is work to do right now; so take No-Doz instead.

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JAMES E. CLINGMAN

The black family continues to endure

The distinguished theologian Howard Thurman once described an oak tree in his childhood yard with leaves that each autumn turned yellow and died but stayed on the branches all winter. Nothing - neither wind, storm, sleet, nor snowdislodged these dead leaves from the apparently lifeless branches.

Thurman came to understand that the business of the oak tree during the long winter was to hold on to the dead leaves before turning them loose in spring so that new buds - the growing edge - could begin to unfold. At winter's end, what wind, storm, sleet, or snow could not force off passed quietly away to become the tree's nourishment.

Throughout most of our history, black families have been like that oak tree. Despite enormous assaults and pressures, black parents and elders remained determined to hold on and persevere long enough to prepare the next generation and give them a better life. During Black History Month, many Americans take time to remember the achievements of amazing black individuals. But black families deserve their own praise for all we've accomplished.

Black people devoted to family saw us through the unspeakable assault of slavery. Beloved historian John Hope Franklin and others have reminded us that traditional myths about slavery destroying black families are a lie: the slavery system and individual slaveowners may have done their very best to try to destroy the families in their control, but it didn't work. When slaveowners tried to mate us for childbearing, we made our own systems of traditional marriages and commitments. When they tried to treat parents and children as nothing more than disposable and interchangeable property, we learned to honor and revere our mothers, fathers, and our ancestors and to see our children as children of God. We all know stories of the lengths newly-freed slaves went through after Emancipation to try to be reunited with one another, sometimes traveling for hundreds of miles in desperate attempts to find loved ones.

From slavery on, our people always fought to preserve our nuclear families. At the same time, we also learned to create other networks of extended family and near-family that laid the foundation for strong black communities and nurturing children. Families saw us through Reconstruction and did their best to shield and protect children during the dark days of Jim Crow, mob rule, and lynchings. Throughout segregation, many black families and communities reminded children they had dignity and worth. Long before the phrase was popular, our mothers and grandmothers took their time braiding our hair, neatly pressing our clothes, and reminding us every day that black was beautiful. During the Civil Rights Movement, many black families fought together every step of the way. Many parents participated in the struggle for an end to segregated schools and facilities because they knew they wanted a better world for their children. In Birmingham, Ala., Jackson, Miss., and across the South, black children marched and were attacked right along with and often without their parents.

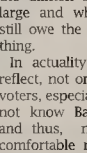
Black families have seen us through many crises, and there have been threats to their stability and rumors of black family breakdown throughout our history. Drugs, poverty, violence, and unequal opportunity have battered our families mightily. Many who are committed to strengthening black families feel that now the forces undermining black family life are turning in a dangerous way with so many black children treading through treacherous new territory. Those of us who see the threats of our families and neighborhoods and social networks fraying know we need to reweave the fabric of family and community that has supported us and brought us this far.

The black family has been preserved through history because of the hard work of committed and determined Black adults. We Black adults today need to break our silence about the pervasive breakdown of moral, family, and community values, place our children first again in our lives, and model the behavior we want our children to learn. Before we can pull up the moral weeds of violence, materialism, and greed in our society that are strangling so many of our children, we must pull up the moral weeds in our own backyards. So many children are confused about what is right and wrong because so many adults talk right and do wrong in our personal, professional, and public lives. I urge every parent and adult to conduct a personal audit to determine whether we are contributing to the crisis our children face today or to the solutions they urgently need. If we are not a part of the solution, we are a part of the problem and need to do better.

There are many external and internal forces at work threatening our children: low expectations by adults inside and outside the family; too few positive role models; incessant images of violence; excessive materialism and greed; and too few basic supports like good education and health care. The black family has been the strongest defense black children have had throughout our history and must become so again. We've already withstood powerful storms. As "Lift Every Voice and Sing" reminds us, we've come over a way that with tears has been watered. We've treaded our path through the blood of the slaughtered. We've come this far on the way, and it is not time to stray or let our children down on our watch. Let's stand up together this year and show our children how much we care.

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MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Obama doesn't get treatment afforded Anna Nicole Smith

By Rev. Barbara Reynolds

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Have you noticed how the vulnerable, exploited, dysfunctional Anna Nicole Smith, has been elevated in death to a blond American goddess worthy of 24-hour cable worship.

In life, she pursued wealth and fame at all costs and became a media darling through her promiscuous, hip shaking, bosom busting antics and accusations of being a gold-digger, yet I doubt anyone asked if she were "white enough," or "lewd enough" or even screamed "enough already, sit down."

In the current political soap opera, we have U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, a presidential candidate, whose father is a black African. In 1991, Obama graduated from Harvard Law School where he was the first African-American president of the Harvard Law Review. With that on his resume he could have commanded big bucks from the prestigious corporate law firms. Instead he opted to work at a church based community center for \$10,000 yearly in a Chicago ghetto.

And now some black pundits are handing white pundits a club to beat the junior senator from Illinois over the head by their stereotypical critique that Obama, who championed the causes of the impoverished, maligned and marginalized in the Illinois state legislature is "not black enough."

If you are blond Anna Nicole Smith, you are defied for doing a lot about virtually nothing. But if you are like Barack Obama you are denigrated for doing much about a lot that should make folks proud.

What does "black enough" mean? It can mean astuteness, pride in one's culture and paying one's dues for the improvement of the black race. But who should decide who is in and who is out?

"Black enough" can also carry a negative subtext and symbolize internal oppression.

For example black Ebonics-speaking students often deride those who speak standard English as "not black enough." I have seen how in Washington D.C., a politician who smoked crack, blamed a black woman for his downfall and grossly mismanaged funds is lauded over a nerdy professional who pulled the city out of financial doldrums. Why? The nerdy mayor was not "black enough."

Does the term mean as New York Daily News writer Stanley Crouch wrote that "other than color, Obama does not share a heritage with the majority of black Americans, who are descendants of plantation slaves."

Can you see that standard being applied to whites that none could run for president unless they could prove they were descendants of slave masters? Do you rule out blacks who were indentured servants or were rescued from slavery by Native Americans? What about the millions of blacks whose parents or themselves were immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, Australia or other parts of the world, such as Shirley Chisholm, Gen. Colin Powell or Sidney Porter? Are their contributions invalid?

When the Rev. Jesse Jackson ran for president, he was disliked for being "too black" because he had the audacity to raise issues critical to people of color, farmers and others locked out of the system.

What is the heritage of black Americans?

Surely it is victimization, but it is also bravery, fighting in many wars, even as we were treated worse than the enemies; of being the moral compass of the nation and dying for freedoms that helps define this nation as a democracy.

Is there anything about Sen. Obama that disqualifies him from that heritage?

Moreover, when you look at people like Tiger Woods, Alicia Keys, Mariah Carey, CNN's Soledad O'Brien, they are mere reminders that we are seeing the rise of a blended America. In the last decades the growth of ethnic so-called minorities in America has been phenomenal. Since 1980, the Asian American population has almost tripled, Hispanic Americans more than doubled, Native Americans increased 62 percent, and African-Americans increased 31 percent, while the non-ethnic population has remained almost the same. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by the year 2050, people of color will comprise fully half the U.S. population.

Obama's life experience may have intrinsically prepared him to represent a multi-racially, spiritually diverse America more than any other national candidate. He spent much of his childhood experiencing the cultural diversity of Hawaii and Indonesia with his Kansas-born Caucasian mother before he moved to Chicago and soaked up the daily indignities of being black enough in America to be denied a cab ride home.

Questions of blackness and spirituality are not irrelevant. They should be asked. But when "blackness" becomes a code word for wrong and whiteness does not suggest wrong even when wrongdoing is overwhelming, we can see the negative consequences of double standards and stereotypical thinking.

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Clinton, Obama and Edwards: They're beyond political paralysis

Right now most of the national polls are showing that the race for the Democratic nomination for president is among the three individuals mentioned above with everyone else in the background hoping they will fade.

On the other hand, polls of the black community are showing that Hillary Clinton is ahead of Barack Obama

by more than 2-to-1 (52-28; CBS News, Washington Post, January 2007). These are early polls reflect not only the name recognition of the candidates, but the early support among Blacks for their bid. However, the polls could not just be a reflection of name recognition, because if that were true, then John Edwards, having run for vice president most recently in 2004, would be ahead of Barack Obama in all of the polls - but he is not.

So, a discussion has arisen about such issues as the relative strength of the Black

vote essentially between Obama and Clinton, why the Clinton support is so large and whether blacks still owe the Clintons anything. In actuality, these polls reflect, not only that many voters, especially Blacks, do not know Barack Obama, and thus, may be more comfortable now with the legacy of President Bill Clinton that Hillary inherits, rather than the promises of the person or program of Obama that they have yet to sort out. Nevertheless, my view is that all of this is beside the

point and leads off into endless discussions that, while interesting, don't directly address the exercise of black power. The real question to be considered now is who can we make the next presidential nominee of the Democratic Party and how can we make that happen? That is to say, it is time to grow up and exercise the power represented by the black vote within the Democratic Party in ways that return dividends our people and not allow the black vote to be split three ways (or more) and become ineffectual in determining

who the leadership will be. But this appears to be the road we are on, by choosing up sides based on personality rather than choosing up our interests. The black vote constitutes from 20 percent to 25 percent of the Democratic primary vote, depending upon the election and in states such as Louisiana and Mississippi, it amounts to almost half. If Hillary or Obama win the early primaries in the predominantly white states of Iowa and New Hampshire, then South Carolina, where the black vote is likely to be

at least 40 percent of the total, could give either person tremendous momentum with two victories under his or her belt. This is a classic opportunity to exercise the leverage of the Black vote by organizing a process to influence who the nominee will be, in a multi-candidate field, that is somewhat complicated by the fact that all of them have credible records. RON WALTERS is director of the African American Leadership Institute and Professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland College Park.



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