

Will blacks and whites ever agree on race issues?

The huge gap between blacks and whites about whether O.J. Simpson was guilty of killing his wife and a companion was in many ways expected.



GEORGE E. CURRY

But subsequent polls, ranging from whether race played a part in the slow federal response to Hurricane Katrina to, more recently, was radio shock jock Don Imus' firing fair and whether baseball slugger Barry Bonds should break Hank Aaron's major league record of 755 home runs, exposes a racial gulf wider than the Atlantic Ocean.

A poll by ESPN/ABC News found more than twice as many black fans as whites are likely to be pulling for Bonds to break the mark (74 percent to 28 percent). More than three-fourths of whites - 76 percent - think Bonds used steroids, compared to only 37 percent of African-Americans.

A sports fan observed on one sports blog: "If there is racism involving Barry Bonds' case for 758, it cuts both ways. Is it that a majority of white people are coming down on Barry Bonds because he is black? Or is it that a majority of black people don't find fault with a fellow black person?"

Complicating matters on both sides of the divide, there are many reasons to dislike Bonds that have nothing to do with race.

"Away from AT&T Park, Bonds is viewed mostly as a pariah, someone who has tainted the game and made its most sacred statistic meaningless," wrote Tim Dahlberg, a columnist for the Associated Press. He explained, "People liked Henry Aaron. They still do. Bonds, by contrast, wasn't a popular player even before his body grew large, his head ballooned to cartoonish size and his home runs started splashing in McCovey Cove. From the beginning of his career, he treated fans and the media with contempt, and they responded with growing contempt for him."

Speaking of contempt, there was nothing like the contempt shown for Imus after he expressed contempt for the predominantly black Rutgers University basketball team, calling the players "nappy-headed hos." The radio shock jock was fired by CBS, the distributor of his syndicated radio program, and MSNBC, the cable channel that simulcasts the show.

There was a general consensus that Imus got what he deserved. Or, was there a consensus? A survey by the Pew Center for the People & the Press found that a majority of people - 53 percent of whites and 61 percent of blacks - felt that the Imus punishment was appropriate; approximately twice as many whites as blacks believe his punishment was too tough (35 percent to 18 percent).

For me, the most shocking racial comparison was the response to Hurricane Katrina. Both Don Imus and Barry Bonds could be written off as creeps. But with Katrina, we were talking about the national disaster. Yet, blacks and whites failed to see eye-to-eye on Hurricane Katrina.

According to a CNN/USA Today poll, a majority of African-Americans - six in 10 - said the federal government was slow to rescue New Orleans residents because many of them were black. However, only one in eight whites shared that view.

The highly-publicized O.J. Simpson murder trial in 1996 was the mother of all racial divides. A CNN/USA Today Poll showed that 62 percent of African-Americans agreed with the jury's decision to acquit Simpson. But only 20 percent of whites thought the jury was right to acquit the former football star.

A 2001 Gallup Poll put all of the polls in context: "Nearly half of whites and two-thirds of blacks think that race relations will always be a problem in this country."

It will certainly remain a problem if whites and blacks continue to look at major issues through their own racial lenses. But there is some good news buried under all of those polls.

The Gallup survey reported, "When asked whether relations between blacks and whites have improved, remained the same, or gotten worse over the past year, similar proportions of blacks (33 percent) and whites (29 percent) say that relations have improved."

The ESPN/ABC Barry Bonds poll provides further cause for optimism. Younger whites are 15 points more likely than older whites to recognize Bonds as the home run king and feel that he deserves to be in the Hall of Fame.

Now, if they could only get the old heads to catch up. GEORGE E. CURRY, former editor-in-chief of *Emerge* magazine and the *National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service*, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached at george@georgecurry.com or through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.

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Support American troops: Stop unnecessary war in Iraq

It is extraordinary that George Bush has managed to position the U.S. military "support the troops" in a role that is symbolic of the war-fighting policy in Iraq.



RON WALTERS

It has effectively put the Democrats in a quandary, because the American people have been socialized by the administration to "support the troops" in a way that it also serves their purpose to pursue the war.

All of the other rationales for pursuing the war have

soured with the American people, but the remaining emotional root of their willingness to follow the administration's formulation of the war appears to be "support the troops."

It works first, because there was much made about their introduction into Iraq with less than effective war material such as bullet-proof vests, armored Humvees, and etc. Then, there seems to be a desire to prove the opposite of the Vietnam war, that the troops, although serving a dishonorable war are themselves honorable people worth supporting.

In this, Democrats appear reticent to aggressively

carry out the mandate the American people gave them in the 2006 election to begin to bring the war to a close and to do this, they have to disentangle the honor due to the troops from the dishonor accorded the war.

Here, there is an eerie similarity to the Vietnam war in that between 1970 and 1977 the Congress entertained 21 separate attempts by members to limit spending by the administration for the war, and thus, to bring it to a close.

Democrats have begun to go down this road with their first proposal to fund the troops with benchmarks of progress by the Iraqi government and a date to begin

to reposition the troops that has recently been vetoed by Bush. In this writing, a second attempt is being formulated that would fund the troops until late July with benchmarks, which will probably be opposed by the Senate, where Democrats are even more loathed to appear not to support the troops.

If Democrats are to stop the war, they have to climb out of the box created by the Bush administration and reconceptualize it for the American people. First, so that they will not appear to be vulnerable on whether or not they did or did not support the troops they have to effectively explain that the

troops are not the policy, they are the instrument of the policy and that the funds provided - or not provided - are directed to the war effort in general.

If Congress does not provide the funds for the war effort, then Bush has to decide whether to put the troops further into harms way. Second, on the heels of a majority vote by the Iraq parliament to establish benchmarks of progress related to a date for the departure of American troops, Cheney made a frantic trip to Iraq.

There he repeated the mantra that "if we don't fight them there, we'd have to fight them here." But how

does he justify Iraq as the center of a "global" war if the opposition to American policy in the Middle East is truly global, finding terrorist cells even in New Jersey?

The Democrats cannot just hope to legislate their way out of the war in Iraq, they also have to reconceptualize it, so that the Republican logic has no remaining credibility.

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A voteless people is a permanently hopeless people

Fraternity pushing for full electoral participation for African Americans

By Donald W. DeBouse

SPECIAL TO THE POST

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. is among a few local groups focusing on increasing voter registration and getting out the vote among African-Americans in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Alpha's national program, "A Voteless People is a Hopeless People," was initiated during the 1930's when many African-Americans had the right to vote but were prevented from doing so because of poll taxes, threats of reprisal and lack of education about the voting process. Today, through its historic national program and in collaboration with the NAACP, Democracy North Carolina and other civic-minded groups, the men of Alpha Phi Alpha are dedicating resources to increase voter participation and getting out the vote.

Are you registered to vote? If you answered no, then you are among the hopeless people and you are giving aid and comfort to those who want to keep African-Americans out of the political process and ultimately out of America's economic success. How can you help change things?

Contact your state senator and ask for his/her support of Same Day Registration (SB 195). Right now, if you don't register to vote at least 25 days before Election Day, you can't cast a ballot in North Carolina; Same Day Registration changes this. Same Day Registration allows citizens to register and vote during the early voting period, from 19 days to three days before Election Day. All you need is proper identification. With Same Day Registration you could go to an early voting site, fill out a registration form and show a current ID and vote - all on the same day.

In states where Same Day Registration has been implemented voter participation has increased; more people register and more people vote. From 1984 to 2004, the top three states that allowed citizens to register and vote on Election Day (Minnesota, Maine and Wisconsin) boasted an average turnout of 64 to 68 percent, while North Carolina's average turnout was only 48 percent, ranking the Tar Heel State 43rd nationally.

The N.C. House version of Same Day Registration (HB 91) passed on March 29. Soon, the Senate will take up the measure. You can help to prevent hopelessness by contacting your state senator and asking for his/her support of Same Day Registration (SB 195).

Getting the right to vote for African-Americans has been an epic and historic battle; the fight still rages and only now is our state government slightly atoning for its past behavior. At one time, it was illegal for blacks to vote in North Carolina; an 1835 law denied free blacks the right to vote. It was only in April 2007 - 172 years later - that the General Assembly expressed regret for the history of wrong inflicted upon black citizens including the prohibition against voting.

In 1965, the National Voting Rights Act was signed into law. Among other things, the act outlawed the requirement that would-be voters take literacy tests to qualify to register to vote. Last year the National Voting Rights Act was signed for a 25-year extension by President Bush. Good news, but the legal right of African-Americans to vote will resurface again in 25 years. The legal barriers may have fallen, but the racial divides and prohibitions to the voting of African-Americans remain because these obstacles are fixed in the minds of some very vocal organizations and powerful people.

Do we as African-Americans take advantage of our right to register and vote? In 2004, 69 percent of blacks were registered to vote compared to 75 percent of non-Hispanic whites; 60 percent of blacks actually voted, while 67 percent of non-Hispanic whites cast ballots. African-Americans, particularly young people between ages 18 and 35, must increase their registration and voting.

The right to vote is very similar to the right to an education. Reflecting on the historic legal battle, Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark Supreme Court decision that struck down school segregation, entertainer Bill Cosby asked, "What the hell good is Brown v. Board of Education if nobody wants it?" Bill's question could equally apply to the voting participation of African-Americans.

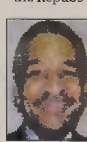
Since the days of slavery, African-Americans have sought the right to vote and many died in the fight just so you and I could have that right today. Do not let their sacrifices be in vain. Do not lose your opportunity to be counted and have your voice heard. And remember, A voteless people is a hopeless people.

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Republican debate channels ghost of Ronald Reagan

Did you see the Republican presidential candidate debate? I found it to be even more ridiculous than the Democrats' debate, not that either of them meant anything serious when it comes to the 2008 election. While I am not on either side at this point, I thought the Repubs were simply pitiful.



JAMES CLINGMAN

There are three or four other white male candidates, which seem to be the only gender and race the Repubs can find in the 21st century, who are waiting to get into the fray. I can't wait to see which black Republican will come out publicly and endorse one of those white guys, especially one of those who participated in the "debate."

The Republican "debate," or so it was deemed, was more like a seance for Ronald Reagan. They were trying to raise him from the dead! Who won the debate? It was Reagan, hands down. Held in the Reagan Library, with not a black person in camera-shot, in none other than Simi Valley, California, where the cops who beat Rodney King were acquitted, the seance was an exercise in hero-worship and groveling at the feet of Nancy Reagan, whose greatest contribution to black people was her admonition to "Just say no."

If they wanted to remember Reagan instead of have a real debate, maybe they should have held the event in Philadelphia, Mississippi where Reagan kicked off his campaign for president. Oh yeah, that's also the city where Goodman, Cheney, and Schwerner were murdered.

The Reagan Love Fest was something to behold, and now that the upcoming Republican campaign has been relegated to a remembrance of the "good old days" of Ronald Reagan, I can only imagine a handful of black folks voting for a Republican candidate in 2008. For the most part, black people suffered under the Reagan administration; why go back and suffer again? Therefore, the next election should be even more polarizing than the previous two, because a vote for the Republican will be a vote for Reagan. I don't know about you, but I couldn't take another four years of the guy Gil Scott-Heron called, "Hollyweird."

I have thought for a while now that if Giuliani and McCain are the best the Repubs could offer they would be in deep trouble in 2008. Now they have Mitt Romney, the one who invoked Reagan's name the most during the debate, and they are recruiting Fred Thompson who, they say, "looks and sounds" presidential, has the same characteristics as Reagan, and is a staunch conservative that can lead the Repubs back from the abyss. Now I get it; all it takes are "looks" to be president. Andre Agassi was right; "Image is everything," especially in politics. That's why George Bush rolls up his sleeves when he visits a disaster site, as if he's really going to do some work.

Considering the Repubs' presidential candidates, if they should win again, black folks will be the ones in deep trouble. White guys all around? Where are Michael Steele, Ken Blackwell, J.C. Watts, and the other two or three black Republicans?

It would seem that at least one of them would be in the race - for show if for nothing else. Instead they are recycling the likes of Newt Gingrich, who is now waiting to make his dramatic entrance into this race. But whoever is in the race, it won't matter to black folks. We definitely will not have a dog in the Republican hunt.

You know, by now one would think black people understood national "politricks." After all, we have been here since the country started; we have fought and died to play in the game; and our group has suffered the most under the U.S. political system, which has been dominated by white men since its inception. One would think that we would always be on top of our game, not allowing the crooks, liars, and baby-kissers to lull us to sleep every four years with dumb answers to dumb questions. But noooo; we continue to go along to get along; we continue to "play" politics, never to win, just simply to play.

What we witnessed in both debates was a mating dance that we have seen over and over again. It was a ritual performed to keep the lemmings in line and to make us believe something serious is going on in the political arena, something different, and maybe even something - this time - that will benefit black people.

The Democrats held a love fest and the Republicans held a Ronald Reagan seance; we were hit with a left hook followed by a right cross, in the first round of this fight. I am sure those early blows were delivered to keep our attention diverted from more pressing issues. There can be no other reason for such "theater," such pretentiousness, such phoniness, and such condescension by 10 white guys on the Repub side and a "We are the World" cavalcade of stars on the Dem side.

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