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THEY SAID IT

The UN system is broken beyond repair. In May, even as its proxies were getting stuck into their ethnic cleansing in Darfur, Sudan was elected to a three-year term on the UN Human Rights Commission. This isn't an aberration: Zimbabwe is also a member. The very structure of the organisation, under which countries vote in regional blocs, encourages such affronts to decency.

The Sudanese representative, by the way, immediately professed himself concerned by human rights abuses at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib.

--Mark Steyn, "Sudan is Getting Away With Murder," *The Telegraph* (London), July 20, 2004.

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SHARPTON, DEMOCRATS, AND BYGONE ERAS.

It should surprise no one that a large number of conservatives consider Al Sharpton's rehabilitation and emergence as a "leader" of the Democratic Party to be both a disgrace and a serious indictment of that party's contemporary attitudes regarding race and race relations. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that *National Review* editor-at-large Jonah Goldberg spoke for large swaths of the political right when he called Al's appearance as a prime-time speaker at the Democratic National Convention two weeks ago nothing short of "disgusting."

Democrats seem to believe that Sharpton's effort to tone down his rhetoric in recent years is a sign that he has joined the mainstream of America politics. Yet, as he proved in his convention speech, he is still an inveterate practitioner of race baiting at a time when the great majority of national politicians in both parties consider this tactic as a despicable artifact of America's past, harmful to both the reputation and the political future of anyone who would even consider using it.

One recent example of the unabashed race baiting that is Sharpton's shtick came during his convention speech when he praised the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education*, but then turned around and used that decision as a club with which to make baseless charges of racism against President Bush, declaring that if "George Bush had selected the court in '54, Clarence Thomas would have never got to law school."

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Aside from the fact that there is nothing in George Bush's record, either as Governor of Texas or as President of the United States to indicate that he has ever opposed school integration, the fact of the matter is that a Republican, Dwight Eisenhower, was president in 1954, and the principal opposition to integration and civil rights in those days came from the Democratic Party, which was dominated by white, Southern segregationists.

In fact, while President Bush has had no opportunity as yet to select a Supreme Court Justice, his record to date indicates that when (or if) that time comes, his first choice will almost certainly be from one of the nation's racial minority groups, with the two names mentioned most often being Alberto Gonzales and Miguel Estrada. There has also been considerable speculation that Bush will, if given the chance, defy conventional wisdom and nominate the aforementioned Clarence Thomas to be Chief Justice, making him the first black to hold that illustrious title.

Furthermore, while it is impossible, for even "the Reverend" Al to know what George W. Bush's view on race would have been had he been president in 1954, it is possible to know what the Bush family in general thought about race. For example, after his unsuccessful bid for a Senate seat in 1950, President Bush's paternal Grandfather, Prescott Bush, spent a year serving as the Connecticut state chairman of the United Negro College Fund, an organization of which he was reportedly a strong and sincere supporter. After he was finally elected to the Senate in '52, Prescott Bush was known as both a stalwart supporter of President Eisenhower's and an early and vocal supporter of the civil rights movement. Indeed, Prescott Bush's record on race and civil rights looks downright progressive when placed against that of, say, his Senate colleague Albert Gore, Sr., who famously voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

But despite Sharpton's aggressive divisiveness and willful distortion of the President's record on race, what frustrates conservatives most about his elevation to a place of prominence within the Democratic Party is that it has come without the acknowledgement of,

much less repentance for, the sins of his past. In addition to the constant patter of racist hate speech, his record as a public figure is replete with Jew-baiting and outright anti-Semitism, fraud, tax evasion, and corruption.

The "Reverend" still admits no fault and, as Goldberg points out, has never made anything even close to an apology for his role in the Tawana Brawley affair, in which he effectively ruined the life of an innocent man, assistant prosecutor Steven Pagones. And while he eventually paid the \$65,000 he owed as his portion of the slander judgment awarded to Pagones, Sharpton mocked the legal system for nearly three years after the settlement was ordered, pretending that he was, despite manifest signs of assets, indigent.

Sharpton has also never indicated any inkling of remorse over his starring role in the "protests" and deaths at Freddy's Fashion Mart in Harlem, which were described thusly by Fred Siegel in a February 29, 2000 editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*:

He [Sharpton] turned a landlord-tenant dispute between the Jewish owner of Freddy's and a black subtenant into a theater of hatred. Picketers from Mr. Sharpton's National Action Network, sometimes joined by "the Rev." himself, marched daily outside the store, screaming about "bloodsucking Jews" and "Jew bastards" and threatening to burn the building down.

After weeks of increasingly violent rhetoric, one of the protesters, Roland Smith, took Mr. Sharpton's words about ousting the "white interloper" to heart. He ran into the store shouting, "It's on!" He shot and wounded three whites and a Pakistani, whom he apparently mistook for a Jew. Then he set the fire, which killed five Hispanics, one Guyanese and one African-American – a security guard whom protesters had taunted as a "cracker lover." Smith then fatally shot himself.

Nevertheless, the Democrats in all their wisdom felt it appropriate to feature Sharpton prominently at their convention. Indeed, prior to Boston, Democratic nominee John Kerry described Sharpton as “one person [in the Democratic primary debates] who consistently was always there, keeping the peace and the compass going in the right direction,” and predicted that the Reverend would do “a terrific job” in any convention speech and would “add something” to the conclave. By the time the convention was over, *Business Week*, among others, was singing Sharpton’s praises, calling him “the toast of the Democratic establishment.”

What, conservatives are wondering, has the Democratic Party come to, if this guy is now the “toast” of the liberals? And what, pray tell, has become of the discourse between the parties, if Al Sharpton is the man to whom the Democrats now turn for moral authority on matters of race and civil rights? Republicans are not stupid. They know they have a problem with black voters, and they know that the near uniformity of black political affinity is, in large part, what keeps the GOP from emerging as the country’s full-fledged majority party.

But the emergence of Sharpton as the *de facto* spokesman for black voters is, it would appear, more than enough for many conservatives to throw up their hands in frustration and all but concede that the relationship between the GOP and black voters will not improve at any time in the foreseeable future.

Fortunately, they are wrong, and their despair is unwarranted. Sharpton may well be the “Democratic establishment’s” new favorite son and the elite’s newly licensed counselor on racial matters, but he is hardly a representative spokesman for all black Americans, much less for all black Democrats. As on most issues, the new reactionaries in the Democratic establishment insist on clinging to a bygone era that not only no longer exists, but likely never did. Like most of the Democratic elites, Al Sharpton is a relic, no more relevant to the entirety of black America than Ted Kennedy is to the nation as a whole.

The funny thing is that the Democrats would not have had to look far to find a more appropriate and representative spokesman for black voters had they even bothered. Indeed, he spoke at their own convention the night before Sharpton, giving this year’s “keynote” address.

Now, I don’t want to get too carried away with praise for political newcomer Barack Obama, particularly since he has never held elected office and is, despite the attention paid to him at the convention, still something of a mystery, with many political beliefs yet to be formed or articulated. Moreover, I will concede that some of his speech employed the same old, tired critiques of Republicans and the same old, tired accusations that the current President uses his faith to divide rather than unite the nation.

Yet, beyond that, his performance at the Democratic convention was a revelation, and a pleasant one at that. Obama not only proved himself a talented speaker and a likely formidable political force for years to come, but also challenged Democratic orthodoxy on race and “identity politics.” His speech was as patriotic, unifying, and fraternal as Sharpton’s was divisive. *E Pluribus Unum* is not, it goes without saying, a phrase too many Democrats have thought appropriate to use over the last few years, yet Obama used it with grace and sincerity. It is no wonder that many observers on both the right and the left agreed with *National Review*’s Jay Norlinger, who concluded that “it would be no surprise if he [Obama] appeared on a Democratic presidential ticket one day.”

While he received a combination of accolades and polite applause for his performance, it did not take long for the defenders of Democratic orthodoxy to respond to Obama with rancor. Two weeks ago, *New York Times* Sunday magazine editor Scott L. Malcomson suggested that Obama “is not black in the usual way” and cited, in turn, Noam Schieber of *The New Republic*, who had written that Obama is “not stereotypically African-American.” One supposes that these men believe that because Obama’s mother is white and his father is a native Kenyan that means he’s not “authentically” black and therefore cannot speak legitimately for more “usual” blacks on matters of race.

Fortunately, most Americans do not see it that way, and even if they did, Obama is hardly alone in eschewing Democratic orthodoxy; he is hardly the anomaly some would have us believe. Indeed, the revision of political thought within the black community – the normalization of black politics, if you will – has been underway for some time, so long in fact that Mark and I noted it nearly six years ago. In an October, 1998 article, we first broached the subject of the emergence of a nonconformist, free market element within the black political community and the effect that it might someday have on the political landscape.

Interestingly, then, as now, the embodiment of this unconventional, more “conservative” rhetoric on the part of black politicians was a Democrat. In that case, it was former Congressman (and Congressional Black Caucus member), Reverend Floyd Flake, who, we noted, had just addressed the annual summer meeting of the Republican National Committee and was, in the words of the *New York Times*, “preaching capitalism, competition for public schools and individual responsibility.” Flake’s stirring speech, we wrote, prompted the *Times* to call the Reverend an emerging “iconoclast in New York politics” and then-RNC Chairman Jim Nicholson to declare that Flake had given “one of the best articulations of Republican principles and values that we’ve had at this meeting.”

In the intervening years, Reverend Flake has remained a Democrat, but has nonetheless taken an active role in Republican initiatives, most notably President Bush’s Faith Based Initiative, which seeks to take advantage of religious institutions’ general capacity for ministering to the needs of their local communities.

And while “Flake” may not be a household name (like, say Sharpton or Jesse Jackson) and likely never will be, such widespread recognition of a moderate/conservative black politician is only a matter of time. And when that recognition comes, the politician who has earned it will wield significantly more power and carry notably more moral authority than Al Sharpton could ever have even dreamed of enjoying.

In addition to Obama (who may or may not be the real deal), Blue Dog Tennessee Congressman Harold Ford, Jr. appears to possess the combination of attributes necessary to emerge as a national political leader – not a national black leader, mind you, but a national leader who just happens to be black.

Along these lines, it is worth remembering, I think, that Ford gave the keynote address at the 2000 Democratic National Convention (at the tender age of 30) and would have been considered a top-tier choice as a running mate for John Kerry were it not for the inconvenient fact that he will be, as of inauguration day (January 20, 2005), constitutionally ineligible to be president, being four months short of his 35th birthday.

Certainly Ford would have been a better and more substantial choice as a running mate than the mildly vapid John Edwards. And it is likewise certain that Ford will, barring an unforeseen turn of events, eventually be a far more important member of his party than Al Sharpton is today or ever will be.

And lest you think that progress toward a more moderate political disposition is exclusively the purview of black Democrats, conservative black Republicans are also beginning to gain prominence. Though you’d never know it to listen to the mainstream media, black Republicans have had an excellent election season and several will almost certainly move into prominent national roles in the next several years. And that’s not even taking into account the two most prominent black Republicans, the current Secretary of State and the current National Security Advisor, the two highest ranking black officials in the history of the nation.

For starters, there is former Godfather’s Pizza CEO Herman Cain, who this year made a surprisingly strong run in the GOP Senate primary in Georgia. And although he lost the nomination to the better-known and better-funded Johnny Isakson, Cain proved himself a formidable opponent, a strong conservative, and a man possessed of the political gifts necessary to become a significant player in Georgia politics.

And then there is Vernon Robinson, who is running for Congress in North Carolina and who is so conservative that his campaign slogan is “Jesse Helms is back! And this time he’s black!” Robinson faces a primary runoff tomorrow against Virginia Foxx, and if, as expected, he wins, he stands an excellent chance of winning the heavily Republican district this November and of becoming the first black Republican in Congress since J.C. Watts called it quits after the 107th Congress.

Additionally, Michael Steele, the Lieutenant Governor of Maryland is a strong conservative considered by many observers to be a rising political star. Steele has made a name for himself among Republicans throughout the nation, helping lead GOP efforts at outreach to black voters; he will have a chance to increase his standing even further when he addresses the Republican National Convention later this month.

Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell (a personal friend of The Political Forum) is also considered a rising star in the party, in large part because of his Herculean efforts to resist the tax hikes pushed by his state’s governor, “Republican” Bob Taft. Blackwell has won the plaudits of, among others, *The Wall Street Journal’s* influential editorial page and is considered by some to be an early favorite to replace Taft as the GOP gubernatorial nominee in 2006.

Then, of course, there is the newly reborn Alan Keyes, the GOP nominee to face Barack Obama in the Illinois Senate contest. And while there is no question that his participation in this race speaks volumes about the overwhelming weakness of the Illinois Republican Party, having a master rhetorician and conservative cult figure like Keyes back on the national stage will be interesting, educational, and more than a little fun.

Is there any chance that all of this will translate into a greater percentage of the black vote being directed to the Republican Party in general or President Bush in particular? I seriously doubt it. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that this ideological shift is entirely undetectable in voting behavior. As *The Wall Street Journal* noted two weeks ago, black voters as a whole

are notably less enthusiastic about the Kerry-Edwards ticket than the rest of the Democratic Party, and this holds the potential for serious electoral repercussions. The *Journal’s* editorial board put it thusly:

A BET/CBS poll released on the eve of the Democratic Convention found that just 27% of black voters are “enthusiastic” about the nominee, and 45% say a Kerry presidency would make little difference in their lives . . .

Six months before an election, the black vote typically lags 10 points or so behind the white vote in intensity. Democrats usually close the gap in the interim by way of black media outlets and other get-out-the-vote efforts. But when the Tarrance Group conducted its battleground survey in June, it found that black voter intensity was trailing by more than 20 points. It also found that union voters, a Democratic constituency that comprises a disproportionate number of blacks, were less motivated by Mr. Kerry than white conservative Christians were by Mr. Bush.

All of this may or may not make any difference come November 2. But then again, that’s not really the point. The point is that the traditional Democratic strategy of treating blacks as a unidimensional voting bloc, comprised exclusively of disadvantaged, disenfranchised, or otherwise dispirited malcontents whose wholehearted support can simply be assumed, is slowly but surely waning in effectiveness.

The Democratic elites have no idea what to do with a black population that is increasingly middle class, that owns homes at a record rate, and which has seen its unemployment slowly drop over the last year. Despite the condescending and awkward attempts to prove otherwise, Democratic Party leaders are just as out of touch with average black Americans as they are average Americans of every other race and color.

And this brings us back to Al Sharpton and conservatives' consternation over the attention paid to him by Democratic big shots. My advice to these conservatives would be: "Relax. Don't get all worked up about something that doesn't matter." Yes, Sharpton is a miscreant, to put it delicately. And yes, he is a hate-filled man who expresses his hatred of Republicans with grace and aplomb. But he is also a relic, a fossil whose ideas, beliefs, and rhetoric are better suited to a long bygone era, if even then. And that, of course, is why the Democratic establishment has shown such fondness for him lately. From Vietnam to "two Americas" to "bring the boys home," long bygone eras are, it turns out, what today's Democrats do best.

KERRY'S SECRET PLAN

Over the past couple of weeks, John Kerry has been doing his very best impression of Richard Nixon, slowly divulging to the public that he has a "secret" plan to get the nation out of the war in Iraq and to bring America's soldiers home, or back to Germany or South Korea, or wherever they were before going to Iraq. Kerry has, in fact, repeatedly promised that "we're going to get our troops home where they belong," and last week declared, "I believe that within a year from now, we could significantly reduce American forces in Iraq, and that's my plan."

The folks over at *The Wall Street Journal* suggested late last week that this "secret" plan of Kerry's says an awful lot about the Senator, about his "dovish 'come home, America' instincts," and about the dangerous message that will be sent to this nation's enemies if Kerry is elected and if his election is perceived to be proof of the United States' disinclination to stand and fight. Specifically, the *Journal's* editorial board concluded:

Last month's nominating convention in Boston was designed to persuade voters that Mr. Kerry could be trusted as commander-in-chief in a post-9/11 world. We'd like to think it's true. But every time he speaks these days, the Senator suggests that his real security instincts are closer to the U.S. policy of September 10.

They certainly make a point, and one that President Bush would be wise to consider emphasizing heavily over the next couple of months. But I think that Kerry's "secret" plan is not only dangerous because of the message it would send to America's enemies, but because it is foolhardy. In fact, given that his troop reduction idea is dependent upon his pledge to convince European allies to take up the slack, one might reasonably conclude that the entire bring-the-boys-home package is either a fraud or derived from a shocking naiveté.

Regular readers will, of course, not be terribly shocked by this analysis. Over the last year or so, Mark and I have repeatedly noted that any emphasis on “allies” in the war on terror is, at best, foolish.

We have both argued that the future of foreign relations will almost certainly be marked by the coincidence of interests rather than traditional “friendships.” Mark has noted that the United Nations, the “ally” most often cited by Bush opponents, has anything but a sterling reputation for success and integrity in its own foreign adventures. And most recently, Mark suggested that any request of help from some of the United States’ European allies would almost certainly be met with demands with which no American President, Republican or Democrat, could comply; specifically, he wrote:

Efforts to bring France and Germany and the rest of “Old Europe” into the American camp on Middle East issues would likely involve the United States in a long period of high profile negotiations with European leaders that could raise potentially dangerous and misleading questions about America’s commitment to Israel, to the war in Iraq, and to its aggressive approach to militant Islam.

Anyone who doubts any of the above contentions need not look far for empirical evidence to substantiate them. For example, the North African nation of Sudan is the site of an ongoing human tragedy in which an estimated 50,000 black Sudanese have been slaughtered by the Arab Janjaweed militias with the tacit approval of that nation’s radical Islamist government. And though it is hardly the most widely covered story, the ongoing human tragedy in Sudan has received a reasonable amount of media coverage and is therefore hardly a secret about which the Kerry campaign is unaware. Indeed, the House of Representatives has called the events in Sudan “genocide,” and Kerry’s favored internationalists at the U.N. have termed the slaughter “the world’s worst current humanitarian catastrophe.”

Moreover, it’s not as if the tragedy in Sudan should have come as a surprise to anyone. In fact, what got me thinking about Sudan this week was the above story about Al Sharpton and the Democratic convention. You see, in that story, I cited a piece Mark and I wrote dated October 1998, which also touched on the “ongoing human tragedy in Sudan.” And this was *six years ago*.

Now, it is surely true that the slaughter and enslavement of Sudan’s black Christian and animist population by the Islamist government has been occurring during all four years of President Bush’s watch. And it is also true that the President closed his eyes to the repellent nature of the Sudanese regime for some time, in large part because after September 11, that government, which once housed Osama bin Laden, agreed to cooperate with America, providing material support in the war on terror.

But by the beginning of this year (before the current round of violence began in earnest) the Bush administration had come to its senses and had decided to take action against the murderous Sudanese thugs. In January, Secretary of State Colin Powell visited the Darfur region of Sudan, demanded that Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir disarm the Janjaweed militias, and threatened U.N. action if he failed to comply.

Then the Bush administration did, indeed, introduce a Security Council resolution that threatened sanctions against the Sudanese regime. In other words, the Bush administration proceeded exactly as a hypothetical Kerry administration would have. It saw a problem; it decided action was necessary to solve it; and it went to the international arena to rally support of America’s friends to the cause. But here’s where things get sticky for purported internationalists like Kerry.

Despite the manifest evidence of genocide, the U.N. did not get too terribly excited about the issue, or about the Bush administration’s efforts to end that genocide. *National Review*’s Dennis Boyles noted last week that “the resolution offered by the Bush administration went off the tracks because

it contained the word ‘sanctions,’” which were apparently unacceptable to some on Security Council. Instead, according to Boyles, “It took nearly a month — until July 30 — for the Security Council to issue its toothless warning: The sanctions were removed and replaced with a threat to maybe impose them later. The government of Sudan dismissed the resolution as illogical and impractical.”

And who, you might ask, was responsible for derailing the sanctions and why? Well, according to the BBC, opposition to the sanctions was spearheaded by the French government, of all people. And they did so in part because they are keenly interested in Sudanese oil, which, like Iraqi oil, is presumed to be rather plentiful. As the BBC put it: “France led opposition to U.S. moves at the U.N. over Iraq. As was the case in Iraq, France also has significant oil interests in Sudan.”

Just for good measure, the sanctions were also opposed by Russia and China. And it is worth noting, I believe, that like the French, the Chinese also have significant oil interests in Sudan. Of course, most of you knew that already, since that again is a story about which Mark and I have written extensively in the past. After the Democratic convention, Mark sent out a “From the Archives” piece which he indicated might have been the straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back ultimately resulting in our dismissal from our former employer. It is, in our opinion, equally likely that said dismissal may have had something to do with the several pieces we wrote back then noting the extensive relationship between PetroChina, which was in the process of preparing its \$10 billion U.S. offering, and the genocidal regime in Khartoum.

In any case, what the Sudan episode demonstrates once again is that John Kerry’s much ballyhooed “international community” cannot be counted on to do anything useful, either to aid the United States or to save innocent men, women, and children. As I indicated earlier, in the aftermath of the Cold War, nations can be expected to act exclusively in their own parochial interests, even when those interests conflict with basic human rights, and especially when those interests conflict with those of the United States. And no matter how charming John Kerry may believe himself to be, or how well he may speak French, nothing is going to change that. As *National Review’s* Boyles put it:

Darfur [Sudan] is the kind of foreign policy the United States would have if it followed the “secret plan” of John Kerry and catered to the French and German politicians who seemingly crave Bush’s defeat. If the French and the U.N. had had their way in Iraq, Saddam Hussein would still be tossing his people to his hungry wolf-boys and looking for a way to get back at the U.S. And who knows? Perhaps by now he would have been successful.

To claim otherwise requires either astonishing naiveté or the will to lie outright to the American people. Which characterizes the Kerry camp? One can only guess. But surely neither inspires great confidence in this man who would be President.

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