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Republican Perspective

By John Littig

The Post-Racial President - Re-visited

The column that was published Aug. 21 in this space compared reaction to the Trayvon Martin death with reaction to the beating of a 13-year-old by three older boys. In the first instance, activists Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton were quick to march in demand for justice; in the second instance they were dead silent.

In addition, President Obama publicly weighed in for Martin, as he had earlier done for his friend Henry Louis Gates who had been arrested by the Cambridge police.

The commonality, of course, is that Jackson, Sharpton and Obama had jumped in when the perceived victim was black, but could not find their voices when the victim was white. Now let's see how the reverends and the president have done in three subsequent murder cases.

On June 30, 36-year-old Joshua Chellew stopped at a Chevron station in Mableton, Ga. There, he encountered four young men who attacked him with their fists, forcing him into the five-lane roadway where he was hit and killed by a car. Police later arrested Antonio Pass, Johnathan Anthony, Kemonta Bonds and Jekari Strozier, and charged them with the murder.

On Aug. 16, 22-year-old Christopher Lane, an Australian student athlete, was jogging in Duncan, Oklahoma. Three teens in a car followed him and shot him dead. Police arrested James Edwards, Chancey Luna and Michael Jones. One of them reportedly told police they did it because they were bored and "just for the fun of it." Edwards and Luna are charged with murder and Jones as an accessory.

On Aug. 21, in Spokane, Wash., 88-year-old Delbert "Shorty" Belton, who had been wounded in the battle for Okinawa, was beaten to death by two teens. He had been sitting in his car outside an Eagles Lodge waiting for a friend when he was attacked. Spokane police believe Belton was targeted because of his age and his small size. "He was defenseless," the department spokesman said. Police have arrested Demetrius Glenn and Kenan Adams-Kinard for Belton's murder.

In all three of these cases, the murder victims were white, and the killers (except for the accessory Jones) were black. And all three crimes occurred after the George Zimmerman verdict - which had elicited so much attention from activists Jackson and Sharpton, and from the president.

But in stark contrast to their heartfelt and full-throated protests of the Trayvon Martin self-defense killing, the reverends have not spoken out on behalf of any of the white victims. As is customary for them, they spring into action only when the aggrieved is black, not white.

Well, to be fair, Jackson did tweet (with respect to the murder of Christopher Lane) “this senseless violence is frowned upon.” Strong stance.

Which brings us back to our post-racial President. As of this writing he has not spoken personally on any of these murders. (Although, after days of urging by many in the media and by Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, a White House spokesman issued a condolence message to Christopher Lane’s family through Australia’s Herald Sun newspaper.)

Well, some argue the president should not comment at all about local matters. But he does have the “bully pulpit,” and thus he is able to influence public opinion and our national discourse. In addition, his own racial heritage makes him uniquely positioned to influence young black men - who disproportionately come from fatherless households.

So wouldn’t you think that, just as the president decries perceived victimization of blacks, he would do the same when the races are reversed? His failure to do so raises two important issues. First, he reveals a disturbing imbalance of mindset on matters involving race. Second, he misses an opportunity to favorably influence the lives and actions of young black men - who disproportionately commit violent crimes and thus disproportionately populate the nation’s prisons.

The occasion of the president’s speech on Aug. 28 at the “I Have a Dream” commemoration on the National Mall would have been an excellent opportunity for him to address the scourge of violence among young black men. If he did it, it was well-disguised.

Echoing the Aug. 21 essay: We can expect no better from the activists Jackson and Sharpton. Stirring the racial pot is their job. But we should be able to expect a balanced and constructive approach in such matters from our president. Sadly, we cannot.

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