

# OPINION

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## Ignoring Reality to Embrace Prejudices

### Richard Nixon's bigotry

BY LEE A. DANIELS

"You won't have Nixon to kick around anymore, because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference ..."



If only Richard Nixon had kept the bitter promise he spat out to reporters the day after losing the California gubernatorial election in November 1962.

His pledge that day, destined to become one of the most famous lines in American political history, was vintage Nixon: full of bitterness – and completely false.

That fundamental part of the character of Richard Milhous Nixon is on display again in the newly-released batch of recordings, courtesy of the Nixon Presidential Library and the secret taping system he had installed in the Oval Office when he became President.

In them he exhibits a peevish disregard for a large swath of

American population, snapping off disparaging remarks about Jewish Americans, Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans and African-Americans.

For example, speaking to his longtime loyal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, Nixon refers to the relatively enlightened view of blacks held by

William P. Rogers, then his Secretary of State: "Bill Rogers has got somewhat – and to his credit, it's a decent feeling – but somewhat, sort of, a sort of blind spot on the black thing because he's been in New York. He says, well, 'They are coming along, and that after all, they are going to strengthen our country in the end because they are strong physically and some of them are smart.'"

Nixon, however, makes it clear that he'll have none of it. "My own view is that I think he's right if you're talking in terms of 500 years. I think it's wrong if you're talking in terms of 50 years. What has to happen is they have to be, frankly, inbred. ... that's the only thing that's

going to do it, Rose."

The vehemence and breadth of Nixon's bigotry, which was widely suspected in the years when he occupied the White House, no longer has the power to shock. It was first proved in the backwash of material that came flooding out of the White House during the Watergate scandal, and has been deepened by the Library's periodic releases of other Nixon tapes through the years.

But the newly-available tapes are no less important, because Nixon's harsh language and harsh views underscore something we should never forget: the persistence of bigotry.

Richard Nixon came of age during the middle decades of the twentieth century, the era indelibly marked by the cataclysm of World War Two. America's literal and rhetorical fight in that war against Germany's and Japan's versions of the Master Race theory substantially destroyed the respectability in America itself of discrimination against white-ethnic Americans – and

it helped prepare American society for black Americans' all-out challenge to legalized racism that would burst into the open in the 1950s and 1960s.

As Vice President for eight years under Dwight Eisenhower, and as a partner in a white-shoe New York law firm during the mid-1960s, Nixon had easy access to the "best and the brightest" of American society at a time when it was abundantly clear that the old prejudices were just that: prejudices.

He, however, preferred to cling to stereotypes – against Irish- and Italian Americans that were staples of the anti-immigrant fervor of the 1800s and early 1900s and stereotypes against blacks and Jews that were much, much older.

Considerable progress has been made in reducing the power of prejudice in American society since Nixon's terms in office. But prejudice still exists. It still has an impact, not only because racial bias remains ingrained in the American system, but also because some significant number of individuals ignore, as Ri-

chard Nixon did, the reality of American society in order to cling to their prejudices.

One need only compare to Nixon's rants many of the blogged reader responses to Edward Schumacher-Matos' Washington Post column a couple of Sundays ago on the Dream Act having hit a snag in the Senate. And, on the same day, blogged reader responses to a Washington Post news article on the settlement of the black farmers' discrimination claims against the federal Department of Agriculture.

The illogical thinking and the callousness that consume some of the respondents underscore the point: In some people, bigotry is impervious to logic or the experience of living in a multiracial society.

Now, as in Richard Nixon's time, that affliction can grip those at all levels of the society, right up to the very top.

Lee A. Daniels is director of communications for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

## The Immorality of 'America at War'

### 'We the people,' are removed from war's burdens

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Are you aware that America has now been at war for nearly a decade? We've been fighting, bleeding, and dying in two



hellacious, multi-trillion-dollar conflagrations since 2001 -- and our blood continues to flow, with no end in sight.

Well, not our blood. Not yours and mine. We continue to go about our daily routines -- go to work, go to the mall, go out to eat, go golfing, go to church, go on vacation, go dancing and drinking. War? Americans pay far more attention to the World Series than to the ongoing carnage in Af-

ghanistan and Iraq.

In a little-noticed speech, Pentagon chief Robert Gates recently pointed out that, "For most Americans, the wars remain an abstraction -- a distant and unpleasant series of news items that do not affect them personally." Military service, he bluntly says, "has become something for other people to do."

He's right. You see, "we" are not at war. We handed off that awful duty a decade ago to the 2.4 million active and reserve

soldiers in the armed services, less than one percent of our nation's people. They and their families are the ones "at war," cycled and recycled into debilitating and deadly deployments.

"We the People" are not even making the minimal sacrifice of paying for the burden we've so carelessly stacked on their shoulders.

Both the Bush regime and the Obamacans--fully backed by both Republican and Democratic majorities in Congress -- cra-

venly put Afghanistan and Iraq on the national credit card. We're piling up trillions of dollars in debt for future generations to cover.

The widening disconnect between Americans and America's wars is not only dangerous for our democracy. It's immoral, allowing politicians and corporate profiteers to sink our national soul in the diabolical depths of perpetual war.

Jim Hightower is a radio commentator, writer and public speaker.

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