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OPINION

Broadway's Racial Maturity didn't come Easy

2013 Tony Award winners take center stage

BY MARC MORIAL

On June 9, Cicely Tyson became only the third African American woman in the 67-year history of the Tony Awards to win top honors for Best Actress in a Broadway play.

She won for her mesmerizing portrayal of Carrie Watts, a widow in search of her past in "The Trip to Bountiful."

In 2004, Phylicia Rashad became the first African American woman to win Best Actress



for her portrayal of the matriarch, Lena Younger, in a revival of Lorraine Hansberry's classic, "A Raisin in the Sun." Viola Davis won in 2010 for her role as the wife of Troy Maxson as played by Denzel Washington in the Broadway revival of August Wilson's "Fences."

In a career that has spanned more than half a century, this was Cicely Tyson's first Tony Award. It came after a 30-year absence from the Broadway stage. In accepting her award she expressed her gratitude for being able to fulfill "a burning desire to do one more great role."

Her award not only caps a career that includes award-winning performances on the stage, screen and television, it

confirms the fact that black is back on Broadway. On Tony night, Cicely Tyson shared the spotlight with three other African American actors who took home Tony Awards: Billy Porter, Best Actor in a Musical -- "Kinky Boots;" Patina Miller, Best Actress in a Musical -- "Pippin;" and Courtney B. Vance, Best Actor in a featured role -- "Lucky Guy."

In addition to cheering the achievements of Ms. Tyson and the other African American Tony winners, we should also celebrate the fact that African American actors continue to make great strides on Broadway.

In fact, over the years the great white way has featured and recognized many more black performers than Hollywood. In

1950, Juanita Hall became the first black entertainer to win a Tony Award for her portrayal of Bloody Mary in South Pacific. Since then, 49 Tony Awards have been awarded to black actors and actresses, compared to only 14 Academy Awards for black actors and actresses since 1939.

Broadway's racial maturity has not come easy. From 1890 to 1910, most of the blacks on Broadway were featured in African American minstrel shows, playing to all-white audiences.

It was not until the 1935 production of George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" that African Americans really hit it big on Broadway. The momentum has continued to build. The late August Wilson has a theater named after him.

Audre McDonald has won five Tony Awards, tying her with Angela Lansbury and Julie Harris for the most in a career. And like Cicely Tyson, more black actors and actresses are being cast in roles originally written for white performers.

It should also be noted that Ron Simons was the fifth African American to win a Tony this year as Producer of "Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike," which won the Tony for Best Play.

We congratulate all of this year's African American Tony winners. We hope their success will bring more blacks to Broadway -- both in the audience and on the stage.

Marc Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Our Star-Spangled Banner Waves for All of Us

Racist attack didn't occur in a vacuum

BY RAUL A. REYES

Before game three of the recent NBA Finals in San Antonio, Sebastien de la Cruz stepped up to the microphone and

belted out the National Anthem. Decker out in his mariachi suit, the 11-year-old "America's Got Talent" alum wowed the crowd with his singing.

On social media, racism reared its head. "This lil Mexican snuck into the country like 4 hours ago now he is singing the anthem," read a tweet that formed part of an online river of hate. "This kid is Mexican why is he singing the national anthem," tweeted another commenter, adding the hashtag #gohome.

It's sad that a child should become the target of such ugly, anti-immigrant sentiment. However, these views didn't arise in a vacuum. The fact is that Republican lawmakers have become accustomed to demonizing immigrants, to the detriment of our civil discourse and to their



own party. Meanwhile, our nation continues to grow more diverse, putting the GOP out of step with a changing America.

After the 2012 presidential election, in which Latino voters overwhelmingly backed Barack Obama, the smart approach for the GOP would have been to adopt a more inclusive tone towards

Latinos in particular and immigrants in general. That's not what happened.

In May, Representative Don Young (R-AK) used the term "wetbacks" in a radio interview. Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) routinely refers to undocumented people by the pejorative term "illegals." Recently, Representative Steve King (R-IA) complained about the "illegal aliens" who "invaded" his office, in reference to the young, undocumented immigrants who organized a protest there.

The young people were protesting in King's office because he sponsored a bill to defund the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which allows people brought to the U.S. illegally as children to

adjust their status. King and his Republican colleagues in the House of Representatives passed the anti-DACA measure knowing full well it has zero chance of becoming law.

Why? Because they have no qualms about being seen as openly hostile to immigrants. Moreover, House Republicans remain opposed to comprehensive immigration reform.

These narrow views put them outside of the political mainstream. A recent New York Times poll found that 83 percent of Americans support comprehensive reform, including a path to citizenship for the undocumented. The anti-immigrant crowd is also bringing down their party. The research firm Latino Decisions has found that when Republican politicians speak negatively about immigrants, it doesn't only reflect poorly on them, it gives Hispanic voters a negative view of the Republican Party as well.

As Republican lawmakers continue with this rhetoric, our country is undergoing a demographic shift. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that for the first time, the number of racial and ethnic minority babies being born has passed that of

white babies. The District of Columbia, Hawaii, California, New Mexico, and Texas are already "minority-majority" states, and eight other states will join this list by 2020.

If the GOP does not soon adopt a "big tent" approach, it risks marginalizing itself as a national party.

Yes, the changing face of the U.S. may seem frightening to some people. But the GOP shouldn't play upon these fears -- it should help dispel them. Consider that the Pew Hispanic Center has found that Latino immigrants assimilate and learn English just like every other group before them.

Or even that the pint-sized mariachi crooner de la Cruz was born in Texas -- the son of a U.S. Navy veteran.

This story has a happy ending. The San Antonio Spurs invited de la Cruz back a second time, to sing the National Anthem at game four of the NBA Finals. Everyone from President Barack Obama to "Desperate Housewives" star Eva Longoria wished him well, and he nailed his encore performance.

With determination and confidence, young Sebastien triumphed over bigotry. What could be more American than that?

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