



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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Differences in Black and White

By George E. Curry
NNPA Columnist

Public opinion polls confirm a fact that has been documented in instances ranging from the O.J. Simpson verdict to recent events in Ferguson: When it comes to race, Blacks and Whites largely view events through a different set of lenses.

Several recent polls provided yet more proof of this disheartening trend.

According to a recent New York Times/CBS News poll, more than half of Black Americans polled – 57 percent – said the killing of the unarmed, 18-year-old Michael Brown by Ferguson, Mo. Police Officer Darren Wilson on Aug. 9 was “not justified.” Among Whites, 25 percent said the shooting death was unjustified.

In addition, 31 percent of White Americans, and 71 percent of Blacks, said they think police are generally more likely to use deadly force against a person of color than a White person.

The performance of Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, also received mixed reviews, so to speak. He mobilized the Missouri State Highway Patrol and then activated the Missouri National Guard after declaring a state of emergency and imposing a curfew. Blacks were twice as likely as Whites to say involving the National Guard only made matters worse.

Only a quarter of Blacks nationally are satisfied with Gov. Nixon’s actions, while nearly half said Nixon’s performance in the



THE CURRY
REPORT

George E.
Curry

aftermath of the shooting was unsatisfactory. In contrast, Whites were divided: A third were satisfied and a third dissatisfied

Not surprisingly, Blacks, Obama’s most loyal bloc, continue to back him by large margins.

Sixty percent of African Americans said they were satisfied with the president’s actions; 20 percent

markers that indicate, in general, that race relations have improved over the last half century, including attitudes toward interracial marriages. Amid such progress, however, there is undeniable evidence that Blacks and Whites look at racially-tinged events from a different perspective.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press found that 80 percent of African Americans say the shooting in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson raises important issues about race that merit discussion. By contrast, only 37 percent of Whites – less than half the ratio of Blacks – feel that way. In addition, among Whites, 47 percent feel race is getting more attention than

guson very closely. Less than half of Whites – 25 percent – and Latinos – 18 percent – said they were closely following the events in Missouri.

There was a political divide as well, with 68 percent of Democrats feeling the Michael Brown case raises important issues while only 22 percent of Republicans contending it raises racial issues that need to be discussed. Also, 61 percent of Republicans say the issue of race has gotten too much attention in the case; only 21 percent of Democrats support that view.

The 1996 murder trial of O.J. Simpson exposed this raw divide. A CNN/USA Today Poll showed that 62 percent of African-Americans supported the jury’s decision to acquit the former football star. However, only 20 percent of Whites agreed with the jury. There was a similar split in polls taken during Hank Aaron’s campaign to break Babe Ruth’s all-time home run record and Barry Bond overtaking Aaron.

Even on a supposedly race-neutral issue such as federal aid to victims of Hurricane Katrina, racial views were split. According to a CNN/USA Today poll, six in 10 African Americans said the federal government was slow to rescue residents of New Orleans because many of them were Black. However, only one in eight Whites concurred.

How can we narrow the racial divide when we can’t even agree if there is one?

When it comes to race, Blacks and Whites largely view events through a different set of lenses

said they were dissatisfied. Whites were split, with 35 percent in support of President Obama and 39 percent dissatisfied.

The New York Times poll showed that 10 percent of those surveyed thought race relations have improved since Obama has been in office, 52 percent felt they are about the same as before and 35 percent said race relations have gotten worse under Obama. Of those saying things had gotten worse, 40 percent were White and 21 percent were African American.

There are many independent

it deserves in the Michael Brown case. But only 18 percent of Blacks share that view.

According to the poll, 65 percent of Blacks feel police have gone too far in reacting to Michael Brown’s death and 20 percent feel the response was about right. Again, Whites had a different reaction, with 33 percent saying police had gone too far and a roughly equal proportion, 32 percent saying authorities had acted properly.

More than half of all African Americans – 54 percent – reported they were following events in Fer-

‘Hands Up, Don’t Shoot’ to ‘Hands Up, Vote’

Out of every momentous national tragedy that Black Americans have continued to endure in the United States, there has always emerged a redeeming moment to push harder and further on the long journey toward freedom, justice and equality. The continuing unrestrained fatal police killings of Black American males in St. Louis County, Missouri is now described as part of a national “open season” to kill Blacks in America. What should we do now? What is the redeeming action that should be taken?

In the aftermath of the murders of Michael Brown, Eric Gardner, Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis and so many others, what should be our next course of action? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., writing in his last book, pointed the way.

Writing in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Dr. King stated in 1967: “The persistence of racism in depth and the dawning awareness that Negro demands will necessitate structural changes in society have generated a new phase of white resistance in the North and South.”

Dr. King’s prophetic words, written 47 years ago, are equally true today. With the “browning of America,” there has been a steady increase in racially-motivated police violence against Blacks and Latinos.

The tragic murder of Michael Brown by police officer Darren



NNPA
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Wilson in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson has reverberated around the world. It is just the latest example of a society that refuses to end racial oppression or acknowledge its racist past. I remember that Dr. King responded to police brutality in the 1960s by telling his followers: “I am not unmindful that some of you have

central point. With all that is going on in Missouri, Florida, Texas, North Carolina, Michigan, Ohio, New York, California, Louisiana, Illinois, Washington, D.C. and elsewhere, we must transform our anger over police brutality, poverty, and economic inequality into a massive voter turnout. We should be preparing right now in every voting precinct in every congressional district and in every state where we live to have an unprecedented high voter turnout this November. We did it in 2008 we did it in 2012 and we can do it again in 2014.

Too often we live in communities where we have the potential

“redemptive,” it is also the right thing to do. Very often police officers are not prosecuted for acts of racial violence against Black Americans because locally “elected” prosecutors and district attorneys get elected and stay in office because we do not vote at the rate that we should. Citizens in Ferguson, Mo., a community that is at least 2/3 African American, only vote at a rate of about 12 percent – about a third of their representation in the population. That is a terrible reality that must now change. Understand, I am not saying that voting in record numbers will solve all the problems that we face in America. But what I am saying clearly is that our failure to understand the power of the vote holds back our progress in the United States.

I was so proud to see thousands of people marching nonviolently every day in Ferguson in protest to Michael Brown’s murder. The unified chant, “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot,” captured the energy and aspirations of millions more throughout the country and indeed around the world. Let’s keep that energy going strong. Let’s remain vigilant, vocal and visible. As we move forward over the next 60 days, let’s also organize and mobilize to register to vote and to massively turnout the vote everywhere. Election Day should be Pay Back Day. Let’s also begin to chant “Hands Up, Vote!” Let’s make the difference.

We all must exercise the right to vote not once but in every election

come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.”

As we say of faith-witnessing in the Black church tradition, “Lord, have mercy, we sure have received a lot of unearned suffering..... now it is time for us to get some redemption.” This bring me to my

margin of victory for local, congressional, statewide and national elections, but we simply do not go to the polls and vote, even though so many of our people died, bleed, went to jail, and “suffered” for us to get the right to vote. Having a right to vote is not enough. We all must exercise the right to vote not once but in every election. It’s extremely important that we do so this year because people expect us to because Obama’s name will not be on the ballot and mid-term voting is traditionally lower than in presidential years.

Voting our political, economic and spiritual interest is not only