

The Sun

Letters
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Did race prejudice swing the Circuit Court election?

In the absence of Texaco-type evidence, we can only build a circumstantial case of racism in the Circuit Court judges race.

First, the color of crime. Jonathan Smith, at forums in which I was present, invariably used Oakland Mills and Wilde Lake as evidence of growing crime. If crime was the criterion, why was one sitting judge retained and the other was not? According to the challengers, both judges are "soft on crime."

Second, the sitting judges were "affirmative action" appointees in which "competence and ability were sacrificed for diversity." Yet both judges are highly competent, both appointed by the governor and both represented those groups excluded most often in hiring and retention practices. Was it that Judge Donna Hill Staton was supported by an African-American politician? Every judge, Democrats and Republicans, has been appointed by a Democratic governor since the days of Spiro Agnew.

Furthermore, the sitting judges ran a combined campaign. Yet one member of the team was elected and the other ran third. This continues the dismal history in Howard County of not electing an African-American countywide.

Finally, the campaign itself was loaded with codes: "crime," misleading statistics, side-by-side photos of Vernon Gray and Debbie Staton, "affirmative action," "political appointments," ad nauseum. What are we to conclude?

The latest diatribe, voiced by Del. Robert Flanagan (Washington Post, Nov. 7), was that although both served an equal amount of time on the bench, the white jurist was more qualified and showed more competence than the African-American. The latest insult is now that the dastardly deed is done, "we must put this all behind us, and unite as a community."

This is the very reason why it is so difficult to cure this nation of racism because African-Americans' goals, aspirations, abilities and competencies are not valued. The game is over, and we are supposed to meet at the 50-yard line and shake hands.

Delroy L. Cornick Sr.

Columbia

The writer is president of the African-American Republican Club in Howard County.

For the last three months, I have watched The Sun make a debacle of the judges race. I have tried to remain silent but this latest "smear" attack against two good people has just gone too far.

I worked for the Gelfman/Smith campaign and am proud to say so. I had the privilege of working with two people who believed in what they were doing.

For The Sun to say that either of these candidates chose to run or ran their campaign based on the race issue is ludicrous. There may be some basis to the idea that voters based their choice on race, but to say that either of the opposing candidates had anything to do with that is an insult that I just can not stand silent about. I am appalled at the way your paper handled this election. To say that the four candidates made this an ugly election without including yourselves in the picture is totally inaccurate.

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Ellen G. King

Columbia

As a disabled World War II veteran whose rights and declining years were greatly diminished by a less-than-lawful sitting Howard Circuit Court judge, I have to listen to a lot of guff from friends and acquaintances that all that has been changed in the Maryland courts, that it's all in the past.

But the shameful racist defeat (I speak as a white male whose ancestors' feats entitle me to membership in the Sons of the American Revolution) of an exceptional human being and first-class legal intellect, Judge Donna Hill Staton, tells me that it ain't so, Joe.

Whatever I served my country for, it was not the shameful votes of revanchist sour brayers disguising their racist baseness as a protest against an "overbearing" governor.

Gov. Parris N. Glendening appointed Judges Staton and Diane Leasure in response to pleas from nobodies like me who have suffered greatly at the hands of well-connected legal sharks, ordinary stiffies who did not have the cash to get the "right" legal representation.

I weep for my country and its ideals, and for the bottom-line justice we richly deserve for swallowing our judiciary's cover-ups and stonewallings whole, aided and abetted by media "balance."

Jack Gonzales

Columbia

Is it possible that the way the names were arranged on the ballot had something to do with the way many Howard County citizens outside of Columbia voted? If we remember correctly, they were listed alphabetically, which paired Gelfman and Leasure, and Staton and Smith.

The areas outside of Columbia probably did not follow the campaign as closely and many went to the polls, looked at the list, recognized Judge Leasure and voted for the two top names. We had to do a double take and search for Judge Staton.

Clyde and Wilma Lopez

Elkridge

As unpleasant as was the campaign rhetoric in the Howard County judges' race, it paled in comparison to the editorial ugliness published by The Sun.

From the beginning, the challengers in the race were labeled whiners and sore losers; their campaign called sour grapes.

When one of the challengers, District Judge Lenore Gelfman, had the temerity to win one of the two positions, The Sun accused Howard County voters of racism (a la George Wallace) and the challengers of gutter campaign tactics.

Frankly, both of the campaigners ran negative ads. The materials published by the Leasure/Hill Staton camp, with the word "Hypocrite" emblazoned across the front, were certainly not the "high road" of campaigning you profess, nor in stark contract to the challengers' literature.

Contrary to your editorials, it is not at all obvious that Judge Donna Hill Staton's loss (the only African-American candidate) was due to racism. Though your commentary extolled the virtues of judges Diane Leasure and Hill Staton (with extensive quotes from both), you ignored Judge Gelfman, except to note that she is the wife of a television personality. How enlightening!

The fact is that Judge Gelfman also has a very distinguished career, spent years working for Howard County and was endorsed over Judge Hill Staton by the local Columbia newspaper, which felt that Judge Gelfman merited the promotion.

The three top vote getters (judges Gelfman, Leasure and Hill Staton) were separated by very tiny margins. The only candidate to lose by a wide margin was Jonathan Scott Smith, a white male. Explain to me again how this reeks of racism?

C. Kondner

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