

Racism on *Nightline*:

An Analysis of *Nightline*'s Coverage of the Duval County, Florida, Election Controversy

by Paul Lukasiak

Summary

After a virtual three and a half month media blackout on the Florida election story, on March 28th the ABC News show *Nightline* broadcast a report that purported to be about “what happened in Duval County.” In reality, the report was a shameful whitewash of what happened in Duval. Rather than investigating the claims of unequal treatment of white and black voters, *Nightline* focused on the “perceptions” of blacks and whites in Duval County in a way that reinforced racist stereotypes of African Americans.

An analysis of the March 28th program is available at <http://www.failureisimpossible.com/needtoknow/nightline.htm> (including a PDF file for printing or downloading), detailing how:

- *Nightline* ignored the overwhelming evidence that African Americans were systematically disenfranchised in Duval County and throughout Florida.
- *Nightline* made no effort to consider contemporary racial issues in Duval County and Florida, which are an essential factor for understanding the reactions of African Americans in Duval to the election “irregularities.”
- *Nightline* presented black voters as unintelligent and incompetent.
- *Nightline* presented African Americans in general as prone to jump to irrational conclusions without evidence.
- *Nightline* misrepresented the opinions and statements of African American interviewees, asking leading questions and editing out any statement that did not fit the apparent pre-determined agenda.
- *Nightline* consistently presented information from black interviewees in a way that encouraged skepticism, while never questioning claims made by white interviewees.
- *Nightline* placed the blame for the problem on the Democratic Party's failure to educate voters, while never mentioning the statutory (let alone the ethical) responsibility for voter education of Florida state and Duval County election officials, virtually all of whom are white Republicans.

Whether intentionally or not, the March 28th program was a systematic denial of the facts that inform African American opinion. Rather than providing insight into the historical and contemporary reasons for differing perceptions between blacks and whites in this one situation, *Nightline* dismissed the African American perceptions as racial paranoia. As the detailed analysis demonstrates, a significant factor in race relations is the distorted portrayal of African Americans by the media, and the influence that portrayal has on white America's perceptions of African Americans.

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