



## **RICH: Learning politics young**

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My younger brother Brian was gifted with more athletic prowess than I was. I ran cross country and track, as well as played soccer up through high school ... but never demonstrated any real talent for baseball, basketball or football. I still throw like a girl. Perhaps that contributed to Dad never really wanting to spend time at many sporting events. But on each of those rare occasions that we did go, those memories are tattooed on my brain. At age 10, Dad took my brother and me to a Braves Bat Game Day. Not sure if the MLB franchises still practice this easy marketing ploy, but at the end of each game, on your way out of the stadium, there were barrels of free Louisville Slugger baseball bats, each autographed by favored and more famous players. Brian selected a bat sporting the signature of Rico Carty. I was fortunate to draw my slugger signed by already legendary homerun king, Hammerin' Hank Aaron. I would meet Mr. Aaron a few years later at a Braves publicity event during the Ted Turner ownership years, and again when he transitioned to baseball executive and entrepreneur in Atlanta's Olympic era and since. Decades have passed, and that Henry Aaron bat morphed into a family heirloom, and later homestead protector, to be most often brandished for checking out things that go "bump in the night" versus any batting practice. More recently, life and circumstances would grant me a brief moment with the Hammer. As COVID-19 ravages the globe, miraculous vaccines now offer a way to slow if not eventually curtail the spread of this killer virus. It was into these waters strode Hammerin' Hank — Mr. Aaron, and his beloved wife Billye, who are also philanthropists and major donors. The pair formed a private foundation, the Chasing the Dream Foundation, which has donated millions to fund scholarships and major gifts to numerous charities and institutions of higher learning. On Jan. 5, 2021, the Morehouse Healthcare Clinic at the Morehouse School of Medicine was the site of vaccinations for several Civil Rights legends and African-American giants of their day and field, each over the age of 75, rolling up their sleeves and taking their shot ... in part to demonstrate its safety and efficacy to the broader population, and particularly aimed at skeptical communities of Black and brown. Interviewed a few days after his first inoculation, the longtime Atlanta Braves Hall of Famer said, "I'm 80-something — there's not much I can do to help." Aaron arrived on a scooter, alongside Civil Rights legend and former Atlanta Mayor and U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young. It was a day of giants, including the founding dean of the Morehouse School of Medicine, Dr. Louis Sullivan, and his wife who also received the vaccine along with other prominent pastors and leaders of the movement that day. I was able to have a brief chat with The Hammer, and I mentioned that I had brought along a special keepsake that I wanted to show him, as well as ask a small favor. Aaron smiled and readily agreed, and I presented that Louisville Slugger, and a Sharpie marker. He smiled, gave the 50-year-old bat a spin, and ran his hand down along the grain, and across his earlier etched in signature, and then, he signed it again. I now am the proud owner of a twin-signed Hammerin' Hank Aaron

Louisville Slugger, with signatures 50 years and a few inches apart. I could not know that Hank's time left leading by example, as he was again doing that day, was short. His final Tweet to his fans, later that same day said, "I was proud to get the COVID-19 vaccine earlier today at the Morehouse School of Medicine. I hope you do the same." Two and a half weeks later, Mrs. Aaron would find her husband had peacefully passed in his sleep on Jan. 22 at the age of 86. The Fulton County medical examiner ruled his death from natural causes, and there were no COVID-19 symptoms. We have two twin grandsons now in my family, the Mighty Mites, just over 4 months old. They know nothing as yet of baseball, bats, or great American heroes ... but the wall of their bedroom is going to sport a twin-signature bat, of America's home run king ... and I can't quite wait 'til they are old enough to attend their first Braves game. We may take along the bat ... seems a fitting way to continue to honor and remember that moment with Hammerin' Hank.

When I was 10, I learned my first lesson in politics. Daddy and I were watching the CBS News with Walter Cronkite, who kept talking about people called Republicans and Democrats. "Daddy, are we a Republican or a Democrat?" I asked. He never missed a chance to teach and, invariably, regardless of the subject, he explained in terms a child could understand. "Democrat!" he responded emphatically. I tilted my head and studied him for a second. "What's the difference?" "Democrats are for the little man. The poor people like us. Republicans are for the rich man." He allowed me to absorb that, then added an illustration. "Franklin Roosevelt was a Democrat, and if it hadn't been for him during the Great Depression, we'd've starved to death. Because of Roosevelt, we'll always be Democrats." As I grew older, I learned that to be true for most of the rural South. They'd always be "yellow dog" Democrats because they hadn't forgotten what FDR had done during the Depression and World War II. When Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal appointed me to sit on the board of the Little White House in Warm Springs where Roosevelt had died, I toted Daddy's Bible into his office. "Governor, if you wouldn't mind, would you swear me in with Daddy's Bible? He loved President Roosevelt." He nodded, chuckling, as he took the Bible. He had been raised by rural Southerners so he understood completely. On the night, a few years after the Cronkite discussion when Jimmy Carter faced incumbent Gerald Ford in the presidential election, few gave him a prayer of a chance. Ted Turner, one of Atlanta's greatest contributions to America, owned a station called WTBS that covered the nation by something called satellite. That night, as Carter and Ford warred, I watched, for the first time, "To Kill A Mockingbird" on TBS. I was spellbound. During commercials, Daddy switched to elections results and always Carter was behind. When the movie ended, my life as a storyteller was transformed. Too, I was about to learn another political lesson. Daddy watched the election results for about 20 minutes then stood up from his recliner and said, "I'm goin' to bed." "But don't you want to stay up and see who wins the election?" I asked. Daddy stopped in his tracks, turned to face me and said with great authority, "I know who's gonna win. God has assured me that Jimmy Carter will be the next president of the United States. I don't have to wait and see." Sure enough, the next morning, we were greeted with the news that Carter had been declared the winner around 3:30 a.m. in a close call. It was the state of Mississippi that had sealed the victory with its electoral votes. "You were right!" I said cheerfully as Daddy sipped his morning coffee. He set the cup down, pulled back and said, "Don't you or anybody ever doubt what God tells me." In 1988, Daddy came home from voting. There was a melancholy that hung around him. "Who'd you vote for?" I asked as he hung his hat on the hook next to kitchen door. "Bush," he replied softly. My eyes widened. "You voted Republican? You said you'd always be a Democrat." His eyes filled with sorrow and he turned to face me. "I didn't leave 'em. They left me. It's not the same party as it was with Roosevelt."

This is a tale far greater than that of two opposing political parties. The first is to teach your children early about the things they'll need to know later in life — like politics, taxes, and the good Lord. And, secondly, it takes wise self-assurance to study the facts and be willing to turn in the opposite direction, the turn you claimed you'd never take. Teach your children young. I still remember clearly my first political lesson at the age of 10.

Second only to his fixation on “climate change” is President Biden’s focus on “systemic racism.” In addition to reinstating mandatory race theory training for federal employees, Biden proposes spending even more money we don’t have to fix a problem beyond the government’s reach. As with original sin, curing racism is best solved internally. It is a matter of the heart.

If racism is systemic, meaning it is embedded in white people, how is it possible to eliminate it? Do those on the receiving end of discrimination have a role to play? This is a question Democrats never address. If spending money is the key to limiting racism, more progress should have been made by now.

If white people are all inherently racist, then why have so many willingly contributed to causes and programs to lift poor people of color out of poverty to become self-sustaining? Why did so many white people vote for Barack Obama for president?

Part of the campaign against racism was Lyndon’s Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” According to the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, almost \$23 trillion has been spent on programs to end poverty, but the poverty rate remains about the same. This is the definition of insanity, repeating the same behavior and expecting a different outcome.

In none of these pronouncements by Biden and the civil rights establishment does one hear about the personal responsibility of those who have the opportunity — if they make the right decisions, regardless of circumstances — to improve their lives.

Some years ago, I visited a Washington, D.C., middle school with the Rev. Jesse Jackson. The group of young people of color assembled in the school auditorium was focused on his every word. He admonished them to stay in school, study, not have kids out of wedlock and stay off drugs. It was sound advice.

Why don’t politicians cite the successes and overcoming of obstacles by those who made right choices, instead of their constant focus on those who are making wrong choices? I think it’s because especially liberal politicians need a guaranteed base of voters who are addicted to government and, thus, to them, to sustain themselves in office.

Is it racist for teachers’ unions in big cities like Chicago to keep their schools closed, denying especially minority children a proper education? They are blaming COVID for staying away, even though some scientists say children are least likely to catch the virus.

If kids are denied a quality education, they could end up in gangs, as some do. It might be argued that denying schoolchildren their right to a good education harms public safety. On an average weekend in most big cities, dozens are shot and killed. How many perpetrators of this random violence are high school or college graduates on a path to successful lives?

In his classic, multi-volume work, “Abraham Lincoln: The War Years,” Carl Sandburg writes of a meeting between a Black delegation and the president one month before Lincoln issued The Emancipation Proclamation.

One of the men took notes on what Lincoln told them. Among many of his thoughts on race — some distasteful and some not — Lincoln said: “Success does not as much depend on external help as on self-reliance.” (Vol. 1, p. 575) Should that not resonate in our day?

The best approach to eliminating, or at least reducing racism is success. Telling stories and modeling those who have overcome hardships is better than singing, “We Shall Overcome Some Day.” Following Jesse Jackson’s advice to those schoolchildren can improve any life.