Opinion

Rush to Limbaugh's defense? Not so fast

*By Leonard Pitts, The Miami Herald*

Feb. 19, 2013

Dear David from Georgia:

I want to thank you for the email you sent last week. It made me laugh out loud.

It seems you were unhappy I took a shot at Rush Limbaugh a few days back. Limbaugh had argued that [John Lewis](http://johnlewis.house.gov/john-lewis/biography) might have avoided having his skull fractured by Alabama state troopers while protesting for voting rights in Selma, Ala., 48 years ago, if only he'd been armed. I suggested, [tongue in cheek](#_top), that Limbaugh would have given the same advice to Rosa Parks, who famously refused to surrender her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Ala., bus.

Which moved you to write: "If Rush Limbaugh were on that bus that day, like so many of us, he would have insisted that Ms. Parks REMAIN seated. . . . Rush doesn't need me to defend him from your silly assumption, but I just like to bring it to your attention that just because Rush is WHITE doesn't mean he is not a gentleman!"

Ahem.

David, Rush Limbaugh is the man who once said the NFL "all too often looks like a game between the Bloods and the Crips" and told a black caller to "take that bone out of your nose and call me back." So the idea that, in Alabama, in 1955, as a black woman was committing an illegal act of civil disobedience, this particular white man would have done what 14 other white passengers did not is, well, rather [fanciful](#_top).

But then, it's seductively easy to imagine yourself or your hero on the right side of history once that history has been [vindicated](#_top). So of course Limbaugh would have stood up for Parks. Of course Limbaugh would have defended Jews who were turned away while fleeing the Holocaust. Of course Limbaugh would have supported women agitating for the right to vote. Of course he would've defended human rights. Wouldn't we all?

Actually, no. Not then and not now.

As it happens, David, your email appeared the same week as news out of Flint, Mich., about Tonya Battle, an African-American nurse who is suing her employer, the Hurley Medical Center. Battle, an employee since 1988, was working in the neonatal intensive-care unit when, she says, a baby's father approached her at the infant's bedside, asked for her supervisor and then told said supervisor he didn't want any black people involved in his child's care.

So, of course, the hospital stood up for its 25-year employee, right?

No. According to her suit, a note was posted on the assignment clipboard saying, "No African American nurse to take care of baby." The hospital, naturally, has declined comment.

David, this is ultimately not about Limbaugh. He is a rich [blowhard](#_top) and, therefore, unexceptional. No, this is about the [implicit](#_top), albeit unstated, "of course" that comes too easily to you and frankly, to many of us, when we contemplate how we would have responded to the moral crimes of the past.

There is to it an unearned [smugness](#_top) that insults the very real courage of those like Medgar Evers, Viola Liuzzo and James Zwerg, who did take the morally correct stand at hazard of life and limb. It is easy to "stand up" for the right thing when doing so requires only paying lip service 50 years after the fact, something at which Limbaugh and his brethren have become scarily [adept](#_top).

But the need for real courage, for willingness to stand up for human dignity, did not end in 1955, something to which our gay, Muslim and immigrant friends - and Tonya Battle - would surely testify. So there is something starkly [fatuous](#_top) in your vision of Limbaugh defending Parks. No, sir. We know where he would have stood then because we know where he stands now.

Perhaps you find comfort in your delusion. But some of us realize we live in an era when bigotry has its own talk show and cable network. Can we find comfort in delusions like yours?

Of course not.