

VIEWPOINTS editorials ● columns



Member North Carolina
Black Publisher's Association

Demanding Respect

Almost every day, officers of the crime prevention and community relations units of the City Police Department are visiting neighborhoods urging citizens to cooperate with the police force in detecting criminal activity.

The officers tell groups and individual citizens that the police can only be effective with their help, a theme particularly stressed in the predominately black areas of the city which have witnessed a large proportion of the city's house break-ins and other property crimes.

However, at the same time, some officers on patrol appear unwilling to extend any cooperation to the black citizens of Winston-Salem.

In fact, many of the incidents which have come to our attention smack of downright disrespect and racial prejudice.

There are long-standing complaints that police do not respond quickly to calls in certain neighborhoods, would rather hit blacks with billy clubs than talk with them and treat our women with an absolute lack of respect.

For instance, there is the case of four black women arrested in their home on Stadium Drive two weekends ago. The exact details of the incident are due to come out during a court hearing in July.

Apparently, an officer investigating a bicycle theft got into a situation which ended in the women, none of whom was a suspect in the theft, being charged with such crimes as resisting arrest, assault on an officer, and cursing an officer.

What should have been a routine call resulted in a major incident involving several officers and the women.

On the surface, it appears that the officers on the scene either lost control of the situation, or worse, possibly went out of control. It's up to the courts to decide what actually happened.

However, we don't think it's too much to ask for our police officers to make minor inquiries without touching off near-riots.

On the other side, police officers are human beings like anyone else. Their day is spent dealing with the worst that society has to offer. It's rare when someone pats them on the back.

And in low-income communities, police officers are the only available target for frustrations about a whole range of societal ills.

It's understandable that the accumulation of the above factors plus whatever personal problems the individual officer might have, could contribute to an officer being in a bad mood at a given time.

Yet, our society entrusts a great deal of responsibility -- life and death responsibility -- to our police officers. They cannot only investigate and arrest, but become judge, jury and executioner in certain situations. And the officer usually has just seconds to decide which role is appropriate.

The life and death responsibility our police carry is far too important to become encumbered by an individual officer's attitudes towards anyone.

We call upon responsible officials in the police department to maintain a constant vigilance to stamp out any feelings of resentment or disrespect evidenced by police officers against any of the citizens of this city.

We also support a revamping of the citizen complaint procedure, which most people are totally unaware of. At the very least, each officer should be required to inform a suspect while notifying a suspect of his rights of the complaint process.

It would also be a constructive step to designate the city Human Relations Commission as the body to hold hearings on complaints of police brutality. Disciplinary action would still be up to the officials of the police department and the city administration.

The above-mentioned steps would bring into balance the twin necessities for respect for law enforcement officers and for respect for the rights of citizens.

Honoring Black Fathers

Few groups in American society have been more maligned than black fathers. Their detractors look with scorn to recent statistics that more than half of black children are being born out of wedlock.

Then, there's his historic portrayal of black men as irresponsible, interested in nothing but having a good time. As with most generalizations, those beliefs have created a distorted picture of the men who play such an important role in the development of our youth.

Any true portrait of the black father must include the sight of men working two and three jobs far into the night to make a decent living for his family, of men taking an active role in civic and church affairs, of men laboring tirelessly to embellish and remodel their homes.

The portrait must include the looks of pride emanating from faces wrinkled from work and worry as his children march through graduation lines or into gainful employment and the stern visages demanding and getting respect from recalcitrant siblings.

Prevailing academic wisdom about the black family has been that slavery effectively destroyed the father-mother relationship, leaving behind a predominately matriarchal society.

Only in the past few years, has actual research into census records and slave birth records documented that the nuclear family of two parents was intact not only throughout slavery, and continues to be long after Emancipation.

According to Herbert G. Gutman, author of the *Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, the rate of family break-up as measured by the presence of a father in the household increased drastically from 1950 to the 1970s, largely due to the massive migration from rural areas to urban areas where jobs were scarce.

Gutman notes the lack of comprehensive full employment policy as a factor in the continuance of that trend. "But neither the economy nor those who dominate the political decision-making process have as a priority the creation of useful work for those driven in such great numbers from the land," he said.

The absence of the biological father from the household, viewed in isolation, obscures the role played by older brothers, uncles, grandfathers and neighbors in




filling the role of leadership and love children require from their fathers.

Taken from that perspective, most everyone can point to someone who fulfilled that fatherly role and who merits special attention this Sunday on Father's Day.

So, let Father's Day be the starting point for a new, more complete look at the man or men who fill the role of father, including those who are not married to the mother.


Let Father's Day also be a challenge to black fathers to make a special effort to bring constructive values and lots of love to their children.



Dr. James P. Comer

Getting Along

Dual Identity



Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint

[Alvin F. Poussaint and James P. Comer are psychiatrists and the authors of the book "Black Child Care." Dr. Poussaint is associate professor of psychiatry and associate dean for student affairs at Harvard Medical School. Dr. Comer is professor of child psychiatry and associate dean for student affairs at Yale University School of Medicine.]

Dear Dr. Poussaint: I'm writing in response to a letter which appeared in your column and was from L.M.J. This person had attended a predominantly prep school and, consequently, become close friends with many of the white students, thereby alienating the blacks with whom this person came in contact.

I want to let L.M.J. know that he/she is not alone. I am a 16 year old junior in high school. I attend a private academy which is founded on fundamentalist, Christian beliefs. Over 100 people attend the school and only six are black. I've never had any trouble relating to my white school friends because we all share a common belief. Two of my dearest friends are white.

Here is my problem. Even since I was small I attended (and still do) an all-black, Baptist church. I've always been a rather insecure person, yet I'm very talkative and outgoing at times. My white friends like this quality in me, yet my black friends (so-called friends) talk about it behind my back and say I "act white," and I think I am better than everybody else.

The only way I can live peacefully is to put on a charade. When I am with my black friends, I talk and act black. When I am with my white friends, I try to please them. When I first entered high school, my two lifestyles (black and white) were totally different. Now they've become more intertwined.

I feel close to my white friends at school, and also to my friends at church. Yet I know I'll never be able to bring my two worlds together.

It's upsetting that in this modern world of civil rights, blacks and whites can't get together. But let's face it, it's a reality. Please tell L.M.J. that he/she is not alone.

C.K.W.

Dear C.K.W.: Your letter describes very well the pain and anguish that many blacks must face in attempting to adapt to two environments and two cultures. W.E.B. Du Bois, the late, well-known black scholar and sociologist, said many decades ago that blacks must develop a dual consciousness - a double identity - in order to psychologically survive in America.

Yet this is usually difficult to do because it's not as simple as behaving one way around whites and another way around blacks. Since we live in a society where

whiteness is superior to blackness and whites have a great share of power and money, the dual consciousness is not equal.

Thus there is a constant, strong pull on the part of blacks and other minorities to identify with and emulate the dominant group in order to succeed in work, education and society.

In such a setting, black styles may not work in helping blacks adapt and survive. Black cultural forms, particularly those in the ghettos, are rejected by many whites despite the fact that they have adopted many of them, especially in music, speech and dance.

It can be very difficult to determine when black styles are acceptable to whites and when they are not because the degree of acceptance of blacks and their styles varies so much among whites.

You mention your black friends accuse you of "acting white." This is undoubtedly because of your speech patterns and other interests. Can you satisfy both groups? I suspect not.

Your attempt to please everyone may be an unrealistic and impossible task which could produce considerable tension in you. Rather than walk a tightrope, try to be yourself as much as possible until you reach a point where you feel uncomfortable.

When you feel comfortable, you should discard those friends, regardless of their color, who don't accept you.

You should understand that some of your black friends may call you names and put you down because they are jealous and/or resentful that you can successfully adapt to a white environment. Blacks sometimes resent other blacks who seem to be making it in the white world.

On the other hand, some may feel resentful toward you if they feel you are denigrating yourself or "Toming" in order to ingratiate yourself to whites. However, you are in the best position to know your own behavior and what others are reacting to.

You can see that this is a complicated problem. It's a wasteful shame that blacks must expend large amounts of energy on these types of racial issues. These conflicts often can literally either drive some blacks crazy or cause them to develop odd personality patterns.

Your interest in making contact with other young blacks in similar situations is a healthy one. It can be very helpful to talk about these problems and to share your experiences because it enables you to gain greater insight. That will aid your future adaptations to a racially mixed-up society.

[If you have any questions for the doctors, send them to "Getting Along," care of this newspaper.]
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Speaking Out John Ingram

There has been too much double-talk in the consideration of restoring the Commissioner's power to protect the people against unfair rates and unfair cancellation of collision insurance.

In a conference on November 28, 1978 Rep. Hartwell Campbell, D-Wilson, agreed that the insurance industry had abused House Bill 658 and said, "I don't really think they (the insurance companies) have behaved responsibly in many areas."

However, on May 8, Rep. Campbell's recommendation to the House insurance Committee was that House Bill 658 be continued indefinitely. He has continued this kind of double-talk by making statements that he has a bill to include collision in the reinsurance facility to stop unfair cancellation of collision, but he has done nothing about it. In a recent House floor debate on insurance legislation, Rep. Campbell said he supported the elimination of unfair surcharges in the reinsurance facility, but then he voted against it.

Rep. Campbell, a former president of Sentinel Life Insurance Company, has

given the people of North Carolina little hope that he will represent the consumer's interest when he assumes his \$39,500 a year position on the State Utilities Commission as Governor Hunt's newest appointee.

As chairman of the House Utilities Committee, Campbell supported the notorious CWIP plan that forces utility consumers to pay for construction of proposed new power plants before they are being used through higher monthly utility bills.

Based on Rep. Campbell's record of voting for the benefit of the special interests, his appointment to the Utilities Commission does not give consumers a lot to be happy about. They could be just as happy with the appointment of a participant in the Southern Bell political slushfund, and the people remember all the double-talk about that.

The insurance commissioner's office has just won a major court victory on behalf of the people of North Carolina. The North Carolina Court of Appeals has affirmed the commissioner's order disapproving rate increases in automo-

bile liability insurance in spite of a bad law amounting to \$23 million which has allowed unjust-dollars which should be refunded to consumers - million dollars to be collected to this court decision. See Page 5

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