

# Winston-Salem Chronicle

Founded 1974

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## OUR OPINION

### Our YMCA

Nestled among woods off Waterworks Road, the new Winston Lake Family YMCA, with its plate-glass and brick facade, expansive parking lot and array of facilities, is a sight to behold, both outside and in.

But to fully appreciate the facility, which did not come easily, one need only visit its crumbling, if venerable, predecessor, the 35-year-old Patterson YMCA downtown.

The Patterson Y was cramped. Its parking lot was small, unpaved and pockmarked. Pieces of ceiling dropped into its swimming pool. Its basketball court was small and poorly lit. Much of its equipment was damaged.

When we visited the Patterson Y Friday, one of its glass windows was broken and water leaked in a room adjacent to its pool, where someone had placed a net to catch stray ceiling fragments before they hit the water. An R&B tune alluding to "Old times' sake" played over the radio in the lobby, paying homage, if only coincidentally, to an old friend that will be missed, despite its dilapidated condition.

The Patterson Y has served the community well over the years and remained a nerve center for black youth in the city, even in its waning days.

It deserved the tribute it received Friday night during a bittersweet farewell ceremony.

And its successor deserves the welcome it received Saturday afternoon during the new Y's official opening, and the welcome it will receive during a grand opening ceremony on June 22.

It includes among its facilities a fully-equipped weight-training room, four locker rooms, a sauna, a steam room, handball courts, racquetball courts, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a children's center with a fenced-in playground and its own entrance, a large gym with six basketball goals that can be divided into two smaller gyms, and a multi-purpose room for banquets and luncheons that can hold 300 and be divided into three smaller rooms. There's even a kitchen to accommodate catered affairs and each exercise area has its own stereo system.

As for the manner in which our community's new Y will be run, Executive Director Norman Joyner seems insistent on organization and professionalism.

YMCA patrons must present photo membership cards and sign in at a reception area that is purposefully designed not to encourage loitering.

Each exercise area will be supervised by a YMCA staff member at all times.

Times for facility use will follow a strict schedule designed with the convenience of most YMCA patrons in mind. For instance, separate times will be designated for recreational swimming and swimming classes at the Y, bearing in mind those periods of the day when the largest number of patrons are likely to require each.

The new YMCA will limit health services memberships to prevent overcrowding and assure patrons quality service.

The watchword at the new YMCA will be family, says Joyner, who says the Y's membership rates will encourage whole families to join.

"You'll notice as you go through the lobby that there are very few people coming in here by themselves," Joyner said Friday afternoon. Then he pointed proudly through his office window at a family approaching the front entrance.

Besides being a recreational facility, this YMCA should be the hub of our community. We can hold our meetings and banquets there and register our youngsters in its day care program.

It's one of the best black Y facilities in the nation. It will employ 18 to 20 full-time staff members, eight to 10 part-time staffers and 30 more staff members during the summer through youth employment programs. We have every reason in the world to be proud of it and support it.

"This YMCA is here forever," Joyner said. "I don't think this community will allow this facility to fail." We don't either.

### About letters....

The Chronicle welcomes letters from its readers, as well as guest columns.

Letters should be as concise as possible and typed or printed legibly. They also should include the name, address and telephone number of the writer.

We reserve the right to edit letters and columns for brevity and grammar.

Submit your letters to Chronicle Letters, P.O. Box 3154, Winston-Salem, N.C., 27102.

Submit your columns to The Guest Column at the same address.

We look forward to hearing from you.



## CHILDWATCH

### Bright results at City Lights

By MARIAN W. EDELMAN  
Syndicated Columnist

WASHINGTON -- The boy sits in front of the computer screen, his hands nervously gripping his knees. A quiz question appears on the screen. He pauses, frowns, then taps out his answer. "Good work, Howard!" says the computer screen.

The boy grins, delighted. Effort, accomplishment and reward -- a simple sequence which most children, as they're learning and growing, take for granted. But at a very unusual school in Washington, D.C., called City Lights, many black teenagers like Howard are experiencing this process for the first time. For them, it is a daily miracle.

The 30 black city youths who attend City Lights are not used to hearing the word "good" applied to anything about them. They do not come from what many may consider "good" families: Theirs are marred by poverty, alcoholism, mental illness and violence. The teenagers themselves have not been "good," by anybody's definition -- many have been to jail, used drugs, dropped out of school.

For the most part, our government and too many citizens write off youths like this. They are allowed to slip through the cracks in our education and social service systems and to drift slowly into permanent poverty, mental illness or institutionalization.

But the people who run City Lights refuse to write these youngsters off. Two years ago, after scraping together funding from private sources, they set up a day school for these emotionally and economically disadvantaged black youth. They began with only two students.

Today they have 30 students, a well-equipped facility housed in a converted warehouse and some private funding with increasing amounts of public funds.

Students approach the school warily: arms folded, guards up against a grown-up world that has repeatedly wounded them and betrayed their trust. These young men and women do not believe that they can succeed anywhere -- least of all within the walls of a school.

But they do succeed, in little ways each day, at City Lights. If students do well in class for one day, they can make the "A-Team," a daily list of student point scores that is posted on the classroom wall. At their weekly riding lessons, they can learn how to master a horse. If they earn it, they can gain access to one of the school's computers.

The successes are small and the progress is slow, but they are occurring and accumulating. In addition to constant attention and support from their teachers, the students receive many different forms of therapy to help them cope with the pain, anger and frustration that have built up inside them. They also get help with the skills they need to survive in the less supportive world beyond the school's doors -- such as lessons in how to interview for a job. And they are provided work experience, since the whole point of City Lights is to help troubled young people become self-sufficient members of the community.

After only two years, City Lights makes no grandiose claims of changing the world. But the school has made a real difference in the lives of these youngsters. Five students have graduated. The student body's reading and math levels have gone up an average of 1.5 grade levels each school year.

Most remarkable of all, among this group of chronic truants and lawbreakers, almost all have chosen to stick with City Lights.

Please see page A11

## The architects of our own destruction

TONY BROWN  
Syndicated Columnist

NEW YORK -- If you read the statistics carefully, you will see what is really happening to Black America.

The Labor Department just reported that the general unemployment rate is 7.3 percent; this amounts to 8.4 million people who do not have jobs. Whites between 16 and 19 are 1 million of the total and black teens account for some 360,000.

The jobless rate for white teens, therefore, is almost 15 percent while it is 39 percent for blacks in the same age category. But this racial gap did not always exist.

As a matter of fact, in 1950 the unemployment rate among black and white teens was nearly equal -- at around 10 percent.

By 1954, the unemployment rate had become identical for both groups. Ironically, the youth employment rate for black teens was higher than for whites during that year. However, in each succeeding decade, the gap got wider and wider until it reached a 24-point spread in 1985.

This disastrous turnaround in black youth unemployment was accompanied by the same demise in black family stability.

In 1954, fewer than 16 percent of black families were single-parent and female-headed, and fewer than 20 percent of black babies were born out of wedlock.

In 1983, 44 percent of black

families were headed by a female, and almost 55 percent of black children were born to parents who were not married.

In New York City in 1984, nearly 80 percent of black children were born in fatherless homes. This devastating pattern, beginning in 1954, persists unabated.

Looking at the numbers, you may notice that the problem seemed to start in 1954.

"... Black America has lost something very valuable. And whatever it is, blacks will never find it by looking for solutions outside of themselves."

What was happening in 1954? For one thing, the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional -- a positive development.

But 1954 also became a magical year to many blacks who believed that true integration had finally come and America would finally come to accept the descendants of Africans as it had the descendants from the rest of the world.

Blacks became the leaders in eliminating the black school system, including the black principals and teachers. Blacks stopped buying from black businesses

to spend in "integrated" settings and eliminated their own jobs. It was time to enter the mainstream, they thought. But the white institutions never absorbed blacks. Blacks, meanwhile, seemed to disband the cohesiveness that had resulted from fighting a visible segregation.

This psychological letdown, after centuries of vigilance, I suspect, led to a rejection of self-help and community initiative.

Analysts are pointing to the breakdown of the black family as the cause of the enormous number of births to child-

mothers out of wedlock. But what precipitated the family disintegration?

Whoever is correct, Black America has lost something very valuable. And whatever it is, blacks will never find it by looking for solutions outside of themselves.

And if you think the situation is alarming now (and it is), project the current rate of the disintegration of the black community into the next century.

Based on the current growth rate, 66 percent of black families will be headed by a woman, and

Please see page A11

## A yes vote for enabling legislation

Editor's note: The following letter was sent recently to the Forsyth County legislative delegation.

To The Editor:

The Winston-Salem Human Relations Commission is a 21-member civic group appointed by the mayor for the purpose of improving relations among various racial, ethnic and religious groups in our city.

Toward that end, we are concerned with assuring that all segments of our community are able to partake in the benefits of living in our fine city, including improving the possibility of minorities and women receiving major city contracts.

However, before our city can take steps toward improving minorities' and women's participation in such projects, it must obtain authorization from the state government.

In our view, contracts let by the city on major community undertakings, like the proposed Winston-Salem coliseum project, should be made available to all the community. We are confident that, given the authority, our local officials can develop a program that improves the participation of minorities and women, while being efficient and fair to all.

We urge you to support pending legislation that allows our local government to embark

## CHRONICLE LETTERS

Our readers speak

upon this important local initiative.

David A. Logan  
Chairman  
Winston-Salem Human  
Relations Commission

no man's whiteness be challenged.

In actuality, the question is not the thoughts of the jurors, but the intent of those in (for us) that fantastical kingdom of the Squires that control some events in the Triad, some of them members of Winston-Salem's own fortunate and unassuming gentry, others those who meet the



## Courtroom Utopia

To The Editor:

It seems the court has fairly achieved its Utopia in the Sykes case. That is, a jury composed mostly of women of the "fairer race." One imagines that this Utopia is enforced by these women's musing fears of angry ex-slaves raping daughters and sisters. Perhaps a whiter facsimile of District Attorney Tisdale (if he would concede that possibility) will slip them notes saying, "Convict the rabid Nigra." Let

gentry's demands.

One wonders, and perhaps in sanity rather than William Buckley's black cuckoo land of the mind, if someone didn't call the Greensboro police from the temperature-controlled comfort of Stillwell City here and ask them not to attend the Death to the Klan rally that we might all flourish more smoothly here under the glass, like rare flora and fauna -- greens that bring home a profit on the international market, if Communists don't encourage the growth of unions.

Please see page A14