

Opinion

Winston-Salem Chronicle

The Twin City's Award-Winning Weekly

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Ernest H. Pitt • Ndubisi Egemonye

Editor/Publisher Co-Founder

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Starting Life Over

Last week, Walter D. McMillian got his first taste of freedom in six years. McMillian, an African American, had spent the past 4 1/2 years of his life on Alabama's death row after he was wrongly convicted of killing an 18-year-old white woman during a robbery in 1986. Upon his release, the 52-year-old McMillian got no apology (unsurprisingly, of course) from Alabama state officials — a state with a history of egregious actions against black Americans. The years that McMillian spent in jail — shut off from his family and unable to lead a normal life — cannot be replaced. He was a statistic — an inhuman murderer in the eyes of the state. And for more than four years, it stood at the ready to pull the switch.



Walter McMillian

It's not the first time that a black man has been wrongly accused of a crime. It won't be the last, either. Remember Daryl Jeter, a black engineer accused and convicted of robbing at gunpoint a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant in Dallas? His conviction was overturned, but the hurt must still linger. The list is endless. But those are high-profile cases the country has read about or seen on network news programs. There are many other African Americans unjustly incarcerated across the country. And they're not just in New York, Detroit and Los Angeles. They're sitting in jails in Goodman, Miss., Portsmouth, Va., Ferguson Falls, Minn., Kalispell, Mont., and Winston-Salem.

That might be part of the reason African Americans continue to make up a disproportionate amount of the inmates in the penal system. Of the more than 20,000 inmates in North Carolina prisons, nearly 13,000 are black. That's nearly 65 percent in a state where the black population is only 11 percent. We should be glad that one more innocent person was vindicated. And let us hope that Walter McMillian can somehow put the past behind him and live a productive life.

Changing the Perception

When Clifton Graves delivered his eloquent message to some 350 listeners at last week's Chronicle banquet, his words rang familiar. They are words that have been spoken for many years. Spoken so often, in fact, that sometimes the medium and the message are taken for granted. But although similar words are resonated across the country at podiums like the one Graves stood behind Saturday night in the Grand Ballroom at the Stouffers hotel, his message must not fall on deaf ears. Truer words were never spoken when he said blacks must change the perception of themselves in order to change the reality of the condition they live in. He could have gone further and said blacks must change their perception of how black businesses are run if black are to businesses to thrive again. That the perception of being gun-toting thugs must change if blacks are to reach their fullest potential and become the doctors, judges, inventors and community leaders we are so badly in need of. These attitudes are a large part of the social ills that burden blacks. We must eradicate these ills, or as Graves called them, "the ABCDE epidemic": Aids; Babies having babies; Crack addiction; Death by violence; and Education and Economic deprivation. That will be a major step to bringing a sustained vitality back into the African-American community.



Clifton Graves Jr.

Creed of the Black Press

The Black Press believes that America can best lead the world away from antagonisms when it accords to every person — regardless of race or creed — full human and legal rights. Hating no person, the Black Press strives to help every person, in the firm belief that all are hurt as long as anyone is held back.

About letters . . .

The Chronicle welcomes letters as well as guest columns from its readers. Letters should be as concise as possible and should be typed or legibly printed. The letter must also include the name, address and telephone number of the writer to ensure the authenticity of the letter. Columns must follow the same guidelines and will be published if they are of interest to our general readership. The Chronicle will not publish any letters or columns that arrive without this information. We reserve the right to edit letters and columns for brevity and clarity. Submit letters and columns to

Chronicle Mailbag
P.O. Box 1636
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102.

Rappers' Usage of "N Word" Not Endearing at All

To the Editor:

When rappers like Shocky Shay and Da For Dimension say that the use of the word "nigger" in their songs is endearing and a way to get close to their peers, I say they have missed the point. The point being, people of European descent have a fixed concept of the term "nigger", and it doesn't matter how much we use the term loosely within our own peer group, the clearly defined meaning will never change. It will never change because 400 years of dehumanization will not allow it to change. This dehumanization weren't) But because of the need to stifle Negro potential in a white world. The term is still used today among many professional whites at their private parties and meetings, and is frequently used by whites who have not gotten "a piece of the pie" despite used within our own peer group and definitely should not be allowed to enter into the mainstream.

According to Manning Marable a renown sociologist, African-Americans coming into maturity in the 1980's and 199's have never personally experienced Jim Crow segregation. They cannot express how they feel to be denied the right to vote because their electoral rights are guaranteed by law. They have never personally participated in street denominations, boycotts, picket lines, seizures of government and academic buildings. The absence of a personal background of struggle cast a troubled shadow over rappers like Shocky Shay and Da For Dimension and many other Post 1960 African-Americans who are poorly equipped to truly understand the current complexities of colloquialisms. The Colloquialism of Dominance contain many sayings such as "Free White and Twenty-One", "Nigger in a woodpile", "Work like a Nigger" and such terms as "coon", "shine", and "darky", to dehumanize African-Americans. This terminology constitutes powerful directives of the ways members of the majority group think about and communicate concerning African-Americans. Consequently, the term should not be permitted by the "ingroup" nor the "outgroup".

Richard Pryor in his use of the word found it necessary to go back to the "motherland" before he truly understood the meaning and dehumanizing effect of the word. Eddie Murphy and Russell Simmons should also take a trip back home in order to fully understand the story behind the word.

When rappers use the term to

boost the sale of their records, they are helping to tear down all that we (pre-1960 African-Americans) fought for, so that they would not have to be subjected to being called the "N" word.

I commend WAAA radio-station for not playing records that use the "N" word. I know that the choice has caused them to lose money, and therefore, it is important for us to support them in their effort to survive. It would be so easy to look at the monetary effort to survive. It would be so easy to look at the monetary side of the issue and give in to popularity, but WAAA understands that being an "African-American radio station" means more than being African-American owned and operated. As for the FM stations that we so frequently tune in to, I wish more people would write in (or send a copy of their article) and voice their displeasure with the airing of the "N" word in all songs.

I understand that people need to earn a lively-hood, but, what I don't understand is how some of us can do it at our expense. You don't hear Hispanic rap groups referring to themselves as "wetbacks" in their songs, or oriental groups referring to themselves as "chinks", so why do we use the term to dehumanize us? We would not accept this if it came from the outgroup, so why do we accept this from our own? What's even more puzzling, is why one would buy the records with the "N" word in the first place.

We who are truly African-Americans in body, mind and spirit and not just "fad" must "stand up" as Marcus Garvey states and not allow the propaganda to destroy us from within.

Billy Booker
Psychological Consultant
Rural Hall

Honoring Maya

To the Editor:

No one needs to defend poet and professor Maya Angelou. Her impeccable record of service to this community, our state and the nation speaks for itself. But a few comments are in order.

In some respects, the editor of the conservative campus magazine at Wake Forest University should be applauded for his industriousness. It is encouraging to see an example of America's youth work hard and become active politically, as well as express himself regarding university policies with which he does not



Maya Angelou

agree.

But it is quite another thing to denigrate an individual, especially poet and professor Maya Angelou — to target her and use her to make a point. It is simply unwarranted and undeserved.

Maya Angelou has brought honor to Wake Forest University, to Winston-Salem, to our state and to our nation. She is respected by her students and the community. A more positive force would be hard to find.

Mr. Meroney: speak your mind, be active politically, stand up for what you believe is right. But, most importantly, be constructive. Let's build, not tear down.

Benjamin S. Ruffin
Winston-Salem

Commending the Chronicle

To the Editor:

After attending the awards dinner Saturday night, I was inspired to write this letter of commendation.

At the banquet, I saw a community come together surrounded by real love and positive energy. The Mask Dance by the Creative Arts Ensemble, the spirited singing of the Healing Force, and the Tambiko rendered by Dr. Alton Pollard called to mind stories I have read about life in a traditional African village. The speaker, Clifton E. Graves Jr., certainly spoke in the didactic mode of guru. In a society that is often artificial and void of love, this scene was a real refresher course. I applaud the Winston-Salem Chronicle for being a teacher of African-American history, a partner in education, and a vanguard in the struggle for equality.

As a former student and now an instructor of the Kemet School of Knowledge, I recognize that the Chronicle is an infinite scroll of

African-American history. Since its inception in 1974, it has been a haven of hope for the Winston-Salem community. It has taken the black community, traditionally steeped in the oral tradition, and has given it a means of permanency. The Pitt brothers and their staff members stand on the shoulders as such giants as Frederick Douglass, Thomas A. Fortune, and Ida B. Wells, who understood that the pen is power.

As a journalism teacher, I am always impressed with the innovative layout techniques of the Chronicle. I attended a journalism workshop for journalism teachers at UNC-CH in 1987. At that time, many of the special techniques conveyed at the workshop had already been mastered by the Chronicle. Therefore, I knew the Chronicle would be an asset for printing the Mt. Tabor Dorian Scroll. Through the help of the Chronicle, we were able to win a first-place rating in the National Scholastic Press Association contest last year.

At the banquet, Ernie Pitt apologized for technical errors such as paragraphs that seemed to just fall off the page or disappear. As a journalism teacher, I can identify with those freak accidents of fate. But you certainly owe no apology for the tradition of excellence that has never ceased to be a part of the Chronicle. Your new layout techniques are also appealing.

I appreciate having an outlet to publish news about my students because it gives them a chance to discover the power of the written word and to start their own portfolios. The Chronicle is definitely a partner in education.

I also give accolades to the Chronicle for being willing to bring facts to the forefront about the Stoner case, the McKeller case and many other breaking stories that gave momentum to the struggle for justice. I am sure that these families are grateful that you dignified their loved ones in the midst of their tragedy.

You have established rapport with the Winston-Salem community. We hear you! In any relationship, there is conflict, and we may not always agree, but I believe I speak for many when I say, we, the Winston-Salem community are with you.

I bid you God's speed. And I say to you in the tradition of the ancestors, "A-Salaam Alakum."

Felecia P. McMillan
Winston-Salem

Clinton Is Very Much In Touch With Reality

A New York columnist called President Bill Clinton "our schizophrenic president" and reported the spreading "fear . . . that our president is an amiable fool."

I don't agree with that diagnosis because he's nobody's fool and a schizophrenic has had a break with reality. Clinton is very much in touch with reality. How else could one sell a mountain with reality. Clinton is very much in touch with reality. How else could one sell a mountain of intentionally deceptive lies to the American public if he were not in touch with the reality the people feel?

No, he knows what's going on. But like with sociopathic personalities, he doesn't seem to have any moral or social obligations as he pursues his own immediate personal gratification — getting into the White House and staying there. In past situations, such as Gennifer Flowers, dodging the draft or smoking pot, he denied his alleged conduct outright.

Make no mistake about it, he's a world-class act of deception. Compare Clinton with George Bush, for example, on the issue of Haitian immigration to the United States. Bush flatly said no and ordered the Coast Guard to interdict and return the freedom-loving Black refugees to their native land of plentiful poverty and ruthless government oppression.

A sanctimonious Clinton said that Bush was personally cruel and implied that he was also a White racist — and "immortal" to boost Clinton's Black political sycophants loudly cheered his rhetoric as proof that Arkansas' infamous Sweet Willie was JFK.

Less than two months into his presidency, this same Bill Clinton sent his emissaries to court to plead George Bush's case that it is illegal to allow Haitians to enter this country and to uphold his "immortal" and "cruel" — and, perhaps, racist policy.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher, on "Meet the Press" conceded that Clinton's old campaign position was "unsound." Christopher, speaking on behalf of his boss, Bill Clinton, said, "I don't suppose you'd want anybody to keep a campaign promise if it was a very unsound policy." In effect, the hypocritical Clinton castigated Bush for the policy he has now adopted.

"How can the Clinton administration defend a policy it said was illegal?" Harold Koh, a Yale law professor asked. Simple. It was a crude campaign device to cast Bush as a racist. Clinton got what he wanted — 85 percent of the Black vote and the White House.

The sociopathic film flam just keeps on coming. In the first six weeks in office, Clinton has pro-

posed taxing the so-called "forgotten middle class" that he promised to protect from further taxes — in the largest tax raise in the country's history. Clinton's critics say he is increasing taxes by \$5 for every \$1 in spending cuts.

Polls show that people are willing to accept higher taxes if Clinton's plan of tax increases and

tic-controlled Congressional Budget Office, are \$60 billion less than Clinton said they were. Republicans claim it's even worse — a \$104 billion deficit reduction gap in his five-year plan.

President Taxes, as some now call him, has finessed the homosexuals on his aborted pledge to admit them to the military. Clinton said he



TONY BROWN

Syndicated Columnist

spending cuts will reduce the deficit. But after all the taxing and the illusion of shared sacrifice, the budget deficit will be the same in 1997. However, this scheme could get Clinton re-elected in 1996 before the deficit problem reappears.

In January of this year, Clinton expressed surprise and said that he didn't know the true budget deficit was as large as it is because George Bush had misled him last year, yet he told Business Week magazine last July that George Bush was lying — that the deficit was bigger than Bush was admitting.

Clinton's deficit reduction figures don't tell the truth either. His numbers, according to the Democra-

was going to give 37 million Americans health care — without new taxes. Now, more taxes for health care are proposed for small businesses and individuals and no more promises of coverage for all 37 million are forthcoming.

After swearing he would never Social Security benefits, he now proposes taxing them. The elderly also get, along with everyone else, a higher home-heating tax and higher taxes on gasoline and all forms of energy.

And to his favorite group of suckers, Blacks, the more than generous urban aid grants promised by Slick Willie are now on the chopping block of deficit reduction.