

OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Black church can lead us

BY EMORY CURTIS

In my area, another black church is packing up and following its well-heeled parishioners to the suburbs, where it will be housed in a costly new edifice. As a result, the church leaves an area where the black poor can walk to its doors for an area where the black poor need wheels to reach its doors.

Frankly, it won't make much difference to those poor who live near the church. To them, the church was footsteps away but, in reality, in terms of non-religious services for the poor, the church was miles away.

That's bad. As black middle-class residents who can afford to leave the city for the suburbs, the institutions that serve them, including churches, also leave and the problems of the left-out people in the area grows.

The new welfare rules with a time limit on cash assistance will add to the problems of the poor. Being poor and living among the poor leaves two outs for survival: take what you can when you can or join with others in helping one another over life's humps.

Unlike many of you reading this column, I'm a child of the Depression. During those times, being poor was the norm.

And in the communities I was familiar with, helping a family over life's humps was the norm. Church on Sunday was always a religious service and an informal community meeting. In that informal community meeting, people shared their experiences and word about family successes and problems was passed around.

Historically, in hard times for us, the black church has served as an internal and external lever. When needed, it brought us together to focus on internal problems and it served as a megaphone to amplify our words to the external world.

In the main, ministers were our leaders and they spoke out for us. The white power structure couldn't shut them up by cutting off their income, because they got their money from us.

During the 1950s and '60s, our churches and church leaders were the solid rocks on which the Civil Rights Movement was built. Ministers across this country were our spokespersons. After all, churches were the only institutions that we had with facilities and leaders in every hamlet, town and city in this country.

We don't need church leaders to speak out for us now; there are plenty of us willing and able to speak clearly and loudly. However, we do need for them to help make the areas where we live into neighborhoods with a community spirit.

Our churches are the only institutions under our control with that capability. It won't happen overnight, but it can happen. We need to start.

As a start, strange as it may seem, a blueprint worth copying is one of the services the Church of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) offers its members. The Economist (Feb. 16, 2002) reports how each Mormon church has a welfare system that is operated and controlled from that church, not by its hierarchy or the government.

The system is simple and could be replicated by small churches as well as by large congregations. There are two parts to their welfare system—collecting the money and dispensing it.

Each household in the church is asked to skip two meals a month and donate the cost of those meals to the church welfare fund for the needy. Even a small church with about 200 families could amass a tidy sum of almost \$100,000 a year to help the needy.

The real key to the Mormons' local program for the needy is that the funds are dispensed by a respected lay member of the church who follows loose guidelines by the congregation.

Some church member may run into bad luck and need a week's supply of food. That person sees the lay member in charge and gives him/her a list of the items needed.

When the lay member approves the list, it is passed on to a local supermarket to be filled at cut-rate prices or the grocery store may fill the order as a donation. In any case, that family gets a week's supply of groceries thanks to fellow church members.

A church member may have found a job, but can't take the job because he/she has no transportation. Helping the member get a used vehicle is a legitimate use of the needy-fund dollars.

That type of operation looks doable, even by small churches. Such an operation would help bond the church members together, which is the first step in the making of a community.

Sometimes a member of the church wants to apply for a better job but he/she doesn't even have decent clothes for the interview. Certainly, members of the church could donate clothing for a clothes closet where members could get clothes for an interview or even wear to work until they get on their feet. If a few churches started such an operation in our areas, they would set a trend that could bring helping people back into style.

Our black churches have led us through many years of trials and tribulations. The increasing gap between those at the bottom of the economic ladder and those a few rungs up may be a harbinger of tribulations ahead for us.

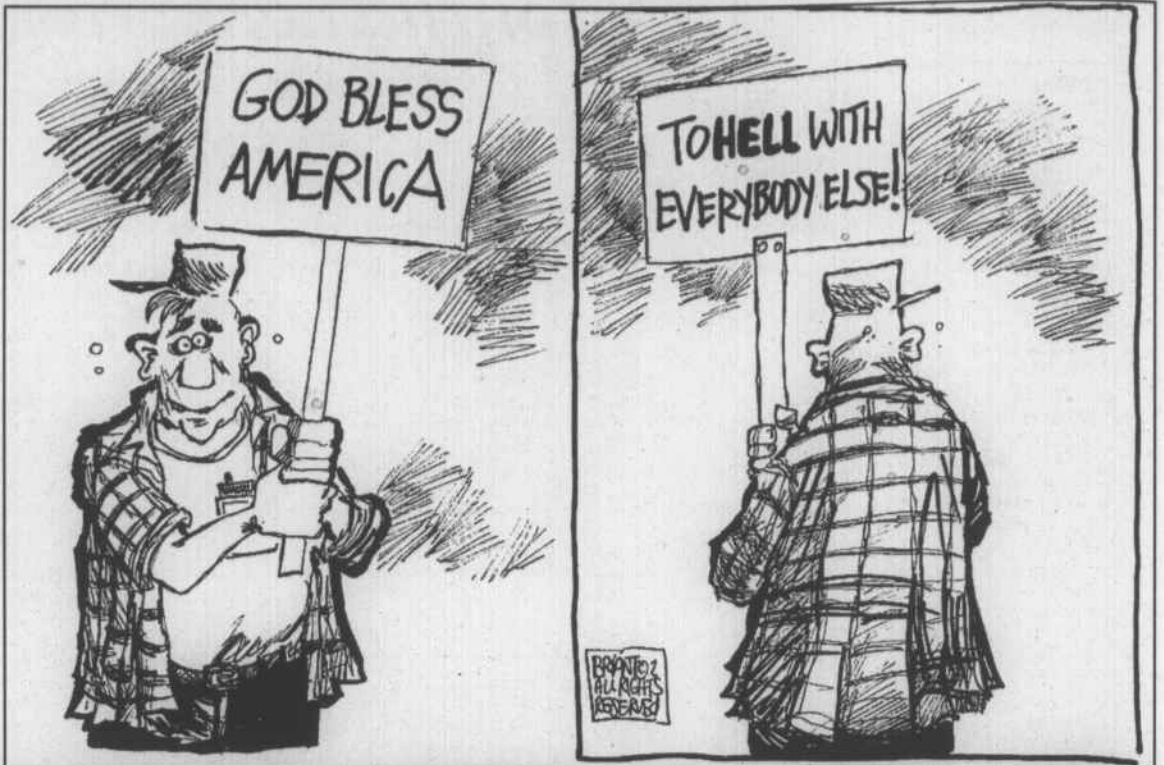
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Correction

A picture of gospel singer Cynthia Wilson-Hollins was mislabeled in The Chronicle's Black History Month special section in February.



Wilson-Hollins



Letter(s) to the Editor

Thank you for the meaningful award

(Editor's note: Philip Hanes is one of the lifetime achievement honorees for the upcoming Chronicle community service awards.)

To the Editor:

I want to thank The Chronicle for recognition of my lifetime association with—and admiration for—its movers and shakers.

I am commissioner of cultural affairs, whose position I am using to finish my 50-year efforts to rebuild our downtown. In this redevelopment, many members of the African-American community have played leading roles—and new players continue to pop up. I'd especially like to credit a few:

• Walter H. Farabee. Doc Farabee was director of work force development when I asked him if he would help me get major funding from the Department of Commerce/EDA program for the Stevens Center (which I saw as a generator of nighttime activities in our central business district). I spent three days with Doc showing him Winston-Salem's performing arts scene. George Karas, director of EDA, was so impressed with Doc's presenta-

tion on the arts of Winston-Salem that he sat with his mouth open. Doc finished his sales pitch with, "Now, if you have any questions, I'm sure my associate, Mr. Hanes, can answer them." We got the entire quota for the Southeast, \$2.25 million.

• Shedrick Adams was working for (then-)Congressman Steve Neal, who represented North Carolina on the Appalachian Regional Commission. We spent a lot of time together and still get together for lunch and political meetings. Our application to the commission generated \$500,000 for the Sawtooth Building and \$830,000 for the Stevens Center. Adams is one of the most versatile folks I know. One day he's helping Tom and Almeta Poole of Meta's Restaurant as a busboy in apron and shirt sleeves, and the next night we are schmoozing in coat and tie at John Davis' home with senatorial aspirant Erskine Bowles or presidential aspirant Sen. John Edwards.

• Patrick Hairston. When he was a leading officer of the Teamsters and president of the NAACP, he, along with Don Elijah, head of the Urban League, wrote two marvelous letters to the editor of the Winston-Salem Journal which I used in D.C. to raise over \$4.25 million for the Sawtooth Building, Winston-Square and Stevens Cen-

ter. Hairston has helped me on other projects as well—and Charlotte and I won't forget the night he cooked chitlins for us in his home.

Over the years I have worked on many projects with some wonderful friends whom I'd like to list, hoping I don't forget too many: Inez Davis, T. Diggs, Virginia Newell, Velma and Roland Watts, Adam and Gerald Scott, James Shaw, Tom and Almeta Poole, Don and Giselle McMillan, Rev. Jerry Drayton, Nigel Alston, Harold Martin, Richard Davis, Mel Tomlinson, Kenneth Williams, Sam McMillan, Marlowe Foster, Joycelyn Johnson, Larry Leon Hamlin, Bill and Vivian Turner, Marshall Bass and Annie Brown Kennedy.

I see new leadership joining the old in our downtown and look forward to working with them: Harold Martin, Joycelyn Johnson, Virginia Newell, Rev. Jerry Drayton, Marlowe Foster, Shedrick Adams, and Lafayette Jones.

All of these see the importance of the arts and entertainment effort to bring life to our downtown.

What's most impressive is that most of the projects we've worked on together have involved no real committees or "powers that be" in the accomplishment. We just set about it and did it.

Thank you gain for this most meaningful award.

Best regards,
R. Philip Hanes Jr.

Congratulations on going online

To The Editor:

Congratulations on going online with The Chronicle. Although we still get The Chronicle in the Dallas Metroplex, it's nice to be able to log onto the computer during the day and read The Chronicle. Reading The Chronicle is the source we count on to eliminate our homesickness. It's almost as though we are still there every week when we read The Chronicle. I suspect the mail carriers read our Chronicle too because sometimes when we get it, it looks like it's been read already. We're doing well in Texas but still miss all our friends in Winston. We talk to the Biggs weekly and I talk to Rev. (John) Mendez once a month, so we're still part of the Emmanuel family. Anyway, congratulations on going online.

Willie and Yvonne Booker
McKinney, Texas

'John Q' and health care revisited



Jesse Jackson
Guest
Columnist

While I do not condone committing crimes in order to receive needed health care, I applaud the central message in the movie "John Q." I believe this message illuminates the plight of uninsured and underinsured Americans. Too often we believe that those persons who do not possess health insurance are lazy and are not looking for work. Although America should provide universal health care for all citizens, this movie discusses the lack of health care for persons who are between jobs and those who are employed but underinsured. How many readers of this article possess catastrophic health care insurance, let alone standard health insurance?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, United Network for Organ Sharing and The National Transplant Assistance Fund:

- 16 patients die in the United States each day while waiting on a potentially life-saving transplant operation.
- 5,000 patients died in the United States in 2000 waiting for an organ transplant.
- 80,000 people become disabled each year as a result of a catastrophic brain or spinal cord injury.
- 5.5 million people in the United States live with a disability caused by a brain injury.

In the United States there



Kevin Connolly, Kimberly Elise and Denzel Washington in "John Q."

Photo courtesy of New Line

are 45 million uninsured people. Of the 45 million people without health insurance, 36 million people are in families with one or more workers.

The National Center for Policy Analysis reports that "although it is common to think of the uninsured as having low incomes, many who lack insurance are solidly middle class. The largest increase in the uninsured in recent years has occurred among higher-income families. About one in seven uninsured persons lives in a family with an income between \$50,000 and \$70,000."

All of us have the potential to be John or Jane Q.

It was within our country's means to provide health-care

insurance for every man, woman and child in America when we had a trillion-dollar surplus. But what did we do with it? We gave it to the rich.

U.S. Rep. John Conyers has sponsored Medi-Access Plan H.R. 2426, which would provide health insurance to most uninsured Americans by expanding, amending and strengthening Medicaid. It takes a critical first step in ensuring that all uninsured low-income Americans have reasonable amounts of health care protection.

The lack of health care in America is broadening the divide between the haves and have-nots. The lack of health care in America is not about black and white. It is about

understanding the true meaning of "compassionate conservatism." Clearly, it means having compassion for our nation's economic elite, rather than the mass of America's working class and middle class that lack basic health care.

The Bush administration must understand that honor and value are determined by how we treat the least of these.

Do we lift boats stuck at the bottom of the sea or add luxury items to yachts?

Keep hope alive!

Jesse L. Jackson Sr. is founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow/Push Coalition.