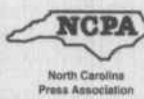


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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"D" Smith, left, makes a point at the race forum.

Talk is cheap

The city sponsored a slate of activities last week aimed at bringing the topic of race to the foreground. The centerpiece was a forum about race held at Joel Coliseum, where blacks, whites and Hispanics were invited to share their views on the current state of racial relations in the city.

In terms of curing racism, every little bit helps. Unfortunately, last week's events put only a small dent, if that, into the problem. First, the people who attended the events have no problems with dealing with people of other cultures to begin with. Attendees are the kind of folks who go out of their way to form bonds and friendships across cultural and racial lines. Those who could really use a good lesson on multiculturalism — the kind of people who avoid people of another race with a vengeance — were nowhere to be seen.

Racism has changed greatly over the years. So perhaps sitting around and simply talking about how to get along worked back in the day. But now, when racism no longer entails being barred from using a water fountain or a lunch counter, it's money and access that talks.

For minorities, racism is

only a supporting character in a cast of many problems. Economics plays the lead role. Communities that blacks and Hispanics call home are devoid of businesses and decent houses. Issues like these, which certainly may be linked to racism, are the ones that we should be holding forums about in order to give people a chance to ask city and business leaders why they have been forsaken. Talking simply about racial relations is taking the easy way out because nobody has to make any commitments or answer any tough questions, and folks can just vow to do better and everyone leaves happy.

The city can have a summit about race every week for the next 50 years and nothing will change because the meetings are designed to be too touchy-feely, and everyone wants to be optimistic. But the issues that need to be addressed to level the playing field are not the kinds of things that can be discussed cordially over Sunday morning brunch. They are painful, ugly and may require the raising of voices.

Talk is healthy, but to unemployed residents of East Winston living in substandard housing, talk is cheap.



Letter to the Editor

Thanks for coverage

To the Editor:

Thank you and your staff for the publicity you gave to the Winston-Salem Air Show before and after the event.

I don't know who all was

involved in the stories and photography, but I would take it as a personal favor if you would seek them out and tell them their efforts were appreciated greatly.

I can place paid advertising to get the word out for any of my clients, but when stories

are published, it gives the event credence and a degree of importance. That is invaluable.

In case you have not heard, the attendance this year set a record. That is two years straight that has happened. The air show is going to

become bigger and bigger, and I hope that you will be a part of reaching that goal in the future.

Thanks again. The coverage meant a lot.

Cordially,
Bob Morphis

Black leaders, not 'Barbershop,' need a trim



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

Talk about going way over the top. The Rev. Al Sharpton's and Jesse Jackson's demands for an apology from MGM over two minutes of irreverent humor in the film "Barbershop" is nearly as laughable as the film.

No one who is not comatose could dare take seriously the deliberately silly crack by Cedric the Entertainer that the towering contributions of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. to the civil rights struggle had no value, and that almost certainly includes Cedric. None of the characters in "Barbershop" certainly believed it. They immediately jumped all over him.

In fact, it's due in large part to the magnificent contributions of Parks, King and other legendary civil rights heroes that entertainers such as Cedric the Entertainer and the writers, director and producers of "Barbershop," all of whom are black, could even get a major Hollywood studio to bankroll their film. Their struggle also opened wide the doors to blacks in education, business and professions. The crumbling of those barriers has given blacks the awesome economic muscle to make "Barbershop" a smash box office success.

And it's that black economic clout that virtually guarantees that the box office cash registers will keep jingling for the film. Look, then, for a "Barbershop 2" and "Barbershop 3" and the inevitable TV series clone.

But underneath Cedric's wisecrack about black leaders is an undertow of disenchantment and resentment that many blacks feel toward those who designate themselves, or more likely are designated by whites, as "black leaders."

Many of these leaders are mostly middle-class business people and professionals. Their agenda and top-down style of leadership are remote and often wildly out of step with the needs of poor and working-class blacks. They often approach tough public policy issues — such as the astronomical black imprisonment rates, the dreary plight of poor black women, black homelessness,



The cast of the hit film "Barbershop," which has grossed more than \$50 million so far.

black-on-black crime and violence, the drug crisis, gang warfare and school vouchers — with a strange blend of caution, uncertainty, and wariness.

They keep counsel only with those black ministers, politicians and professional and business leaders they consider respectable and legitimate and will blindly march in lock-step with their program.

Worst of all, they horribly disfigure black leadership by turning it into a corporate style competitive business in which success is measured by piling up political favors and corporate dollars.

The sad thing is that it wasn't always this way. For decades mainstream black organizations such as the NAACP relied on the nickels and dimes of poor and working-class blacks for their support. This gave them complete independence and a solid constituency to mount powerful campaigns for jobs, better housing, quality schools, and against police violence and lynching.

The profound shift in the method and style of black leadership began in the 1970s. With the murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, the collapse of the traditional civil rights organizations, the destruction and co-optation of militant activist groups, mainstream black leaders, politicians and ministers did a sharp volte-face. They quickly defined the black agenda as starting more and better busi-



Cedric the Entertainer plays the controversial character who criticizes civil rights figures, like Rosa Parks.

nesses; grabbing more spots in corporations, universities and the professions; electing more Democrats; buying bigger and more expensive homes; taking more luxury vacations; and gaining admission into more country clubs.

The biggest gripe many blacks have about some black leaders is that they arrogate to themselves the sole right to speak exclusively on behalf of all blacks. That is much evident in Sharpton's demand that MGM excise Cedric's politically incorrect quip from a film that has already been seen by thousands. This makes it seem that the demand to slice is

made on behalf of all blacks.

Black leaders get away with this arrogant presumption because many whites regard blacks as so far outside the political and social pale that they see blacks solely through the prism of a racial monolith. They are profoundly conditioned to believe that all blacks think, act and sway to the same racial beat. They freely use the words and deeds of the chosen black leader as the standard for African-American behavior. When the beleaguered chosen one makes a real or contrived misstep, he or she becomes the whipping boy among many whites, and blacks are blamed for being rash, foolhardy, irresponsible and prone to shuffle the race card on every social ill that befalls them.

"Barbershop" is more than a comedy, slice-of-black-life film. It spotlights the historic role that barbershops in black, and probably other ethnic neighborhoods, have traditionally played in allowing working people to vent, swap gossip and share information, keep abreast of social and political issues, and to express their own special brand of ethnic in-group humor. There is no need to apologize for or to cut that out.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and columnist. Visit his news and opinion Web site: www.thehutchinsonreport.com. He is the author of "The Crisis in Black and Black" (Middle Passage Press).



Elizabeth Dole speaks at a Republican event in the 1990s.

Don't go there, Liddy

From the years she spent leading the American Red Cross to her time running the U.S. Department of Labor, Elizabeth Dole certainly has many things that she can toot her own horn about.

Civil rights, however, ain't one of them.

Dole's people say that the Salisbury native wants support from all segments of North Carolina's population in her attempt to replace Jesse Helms in the U.S. Senate. And apparently she wants to be a bit of all things for all people.

Earlier this year when she threw her hat in the ring for the race, she tried to shore up votes from Helms supporters by stating that she and the outgoing senator see eye to eye on the issues. Last week she told a national television audience that she has always been a champion of civil rights.

How is it possible for the same person to be gung-ho over Helms — the devil incarnate to many black people — and a civil rights supporter? The answer is, it is not possible. It is an oxymoron, like meat-eating vegetarian.

Dole chose her team when she expressed her admiration for Helms. She shouldn't expect to win over blacks now with her civil rights record, or lack thereof, which seems to be the case. Although Dole has never held elected office, she has quickly picked up the skills of a veteran fast-talking politician.

Here's some advice for Liddy: Talk about your small town values, talk about how you made it big, talk about Social Security, if you will, but don't talk about what you and your husband have done for black folks. You know better and voters know better.