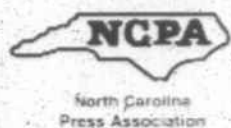


# OPINION/ FORUM

## THE CHRONICLE

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## Breaking the Silence Spares Others

There are those of you who don't care for our decision to, on occasion, highlight the dark underbelly of our society, with stories about things that make folks uncomfortable to talk about — things like sexual abuse.

Now nobody's denying that the very idea of a father, mother, uncle or friend touching a child in such a way is disgusting. We're not here to debate the morality or lack thereof. But the truth is it's happening. It's happening in our schools, in our churches, in our own homes. Ignoring that simple truth will not make such atrocities go away. Conversely, it will likely allow them to continue to spread.

Even after the abuse stops, the effects of it continue to fester. Countless women and, yes, men, struggle everyday with the burden of a childhood secret that they feel too ashamed to tell. It isn't easy after all — in a society that's inclined to blame the victim — to admit that such an abhorrent thing happened to you. In contrast to a random robbery or assault, we as a nation and as a people seem determined to find fault with the victim nearly as often as the perpetrator in cases of rape and molestation, even if the victim was a child!

Just ask folks like Chevara Orrin or Beverly Robinson, who have bravely revealed their stories of incest in hopes of helping others find peace.

In both cases, the women were met with an outpouring of support from strangers and loved ones alike, and contacted by a staggering number of victims who poured out their own tales of abuse and incest and praised them for their grit and fortitude. However, they have also seen their share of criticism, from people who assert that it is improper to speak about such things, or those who believe the reputation of their attackers is more important than the physical and emotional well-being of their victims.

They have been shamed and chastised for their forthcomingness, by those who either don't understand the devastation of such an act, or know it all too well and are afraid that they might also have to face their demons.

Yet Orrin, and in turn, Robinson, have remained steadfast, refusing to be moved by the ranting of cowards.

Why? Because they know their words have power. They have seen their testimonies cause others to break free from years of shame and self-hatred stemming from an incident, or series of incidents, that was



Chevara Orrin



Beverly Robinson

beyond their control or understanding. They have seen women and men, weeping, overcome with gratitude for their courage. They have watched the weight lift off the shoulders of elderly victims who have spent a lifetime stooped under the weight of their secrets, fully believing that no one would believe, no one would understand, no one would care.

We applaud these women who sacrifice themselves and their own privacy to empower others. Surely, their words are carrying far beyond their stories. And we're going to keep on telling their stories, even if it makes some of our readers feel uncomfortable, because we too have seen the healing and affirmation such honesty and candor can bring.

If it makes us a little queasy to hear these tales, we can only imagine the agony survivors must feel. But, if Orrin and Robinson, and the many, many others who are inspired by their strength keep talking about these issues, then maybe, just maybe, we can begin to bring this problem out to the forefront of our collective consciousness. Then and only then can we propose to find ways to heal from these heinous and egregious crimes and stop them from infiltrating and damaging another generation.

## Hopes for Palestine and Obama

As I write this column, Israel is carrying out a devastating attack on the Gaza Strip, attempting to complete the final destruction of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement that controls that territory. By the time you read this commentary, it is impossible to predict how the situation will have devolved or evolved.

In either case, the Israeli attack is beyond criminal in its actions and proportions, carrying out what is known in international law as "collective punishment" against the Palestinian people in order to destroy Hamas.

What has been remarkable, saddening, and sick to watch has been the response to this attack in U.S. political circles. Once again, there has been an effort to suggest an equivalence between the miniscule military force of the Palestinians (in this case the Hamas) and the might of Israel, which possesses one of the top ten military machines on this planet. There



Bill Fletcher  
Guest Columnist

has also been precious little attention to the fact that Israel—with the backing of the Bush administration — has been carrying out an illegal strangulation campaign against Gaza, again as a means of attempting to destroy Hamas.

So, here we are again, at a New Year filled with hope and dread, with most of us in the USA focusing, quite understandably, on the deteriorating economic situation. In cases like these it is all too easy to forget about the international situation, or to deny its importance. This year, we cannot afford for that to happen.

In case you have not noticed, people in the Arab World are furious about what has been transpiring in the Gaza. They are not only furious about the Israeli attack, but they are as furious about the anemic response on the part of Arab nation states. In the background, of course, is their fury with the USA — and much of Europe — for either openly or indirectly condoning further aggression by Israel.

Now enters President-elect Obama. The Arab World in general, and the Palestinian people specifically, have not been jumping for joy concerning the emergence of President-elect Obama.

While opinion polls indicate that they are delighted that Bush is returning to Texas, they have few expectations that Obama will offer anything new under the sun when it comes to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. While you, the reader, may think that this is a cynical and premature evaluation, it has been evident that Obama has gone out of his way to cultivate and satisfy anti-Palestinian forces in the USA, while, for all intents and purposes, "dissing" the pro-Palestinian community in the USA.

I have heard many people suggest that Barack Obama had to cultivate ties with anti-Palestinian forces in the USA in order to get elected.

My question then is simple: What does that leave us with? And, more importantly, what level of hope that we can believe in, does that leave for the Palestinians?

Rather than suggest what President-elect Obama will or will not do with regard to the Palestinians, I want to offer a few proposals that might set a new tone:

- An enforced restriction on the use of US-built military equipment in operations against the Palestinians.

- A demand that Israel tear down the so-called "apartheid wall" that has been built in, around and through Palestinian territories on the West Bank.

- A demand for a cessation of Israeli military operations against the Palestinians, including targeted assassinations.

- An end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza.
- A special envoy to work with the United Nations and the Arab League on a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

This is NOT my entire wish list. It is what I would like to see President-elect Obama do immediately.

But since I do not believe that wishes can stand alone, those of us who believe in peace and justice in the Middle East, and freedom for the Palestinian people, must find means to put pressure on both the incoming Obama administration and Israel to change course.

Israel will never cease its aggression to the extent to which it believes that the USA will turn a blind eye to its activities. And, no U.S. administration will ever change course unless it is compelled to by the pressure from a domestic populace, furious at the display of arrogance by a US ally, all in the name of self-preservation.

President-elect Obama: Can we ask you to deliver or assist in delivering change in the Middle East that will cease having the USA complicit in injustice?

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## Dynasty or Democracy

Is our nation a democracy or a creator of political dynasties? Or are we a combination of both.

As the United States Senate continues to gel, and as people jockey for appointments and anointings, it is interesting to ask how much "name" matters, and whether other factors propel politicians to prominence. President-elect Barack Obama came to the table with scant lineage.

Neither his mother or his father, nor anyone he knew had been in politics. Yet, Obama snatched the crown from an ambivalent insider, partly because he was able to create energy around the concept of "change."

Democracy or dynasty-creator? Obama's election says democracy.

On the other hand, former President George Herbert Walker Bush touted his son, Jeb, as a future president. He said, "I think he's as qualified and able as anyone I know on the political scene."

Qualified and able to, what, shrug off his lineage? While the Bush family is surrounded by a cadre of loyalists, it might be difficult for Jeb Bush to overcome the legacy of war and economic devastation that has been left by his brother, the current President.

If Mr. Bush had his way, it would be by dynasty, not democracy. Other than President John Adams, he is the only President who has a son who has also served. I find it a special kind of hubris that Bush 41 (the first President Bush) would assert that Jeb Bush should be President.

But for some, politics is a family business.

I don't envy New York Governor David Patterson. He is living in a situation best described as "can't win." When the daughter of one of our nation's most popular presidents indicates her interest in a vacated Senate seat, he has to pay attention. And when the national media comes raining down on their perception of her scant credentials, he has to be concerned.

Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg has been more than an author and mother. She has also been a civic leader, raising money for public schools and for conservation issues. Is that enough to qualify her for a seat in the United States Senate? And in choosing her, can Patterson ignore another dynasty, the Cuomo dynasty, since Andrew Cuomo has also indicated that he is interested in the Senate Seat.

Speaking of Hillary Rodham Clinton, there was bristly talk about a Clinton dynasty when she stepped out to run for Senate from New York in 2000. People bandied about terms like "carpetbagger" to describe the former first lady, and many suggested that she didn't deserve the seat once held by Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

But New York Congressman Charlie Rangel had her back, as did others. So despite the talk, she won an election in 2000 and performed so well she was elected again in 2006. Still, the dynastic nattering intensified when Clinton ran for President in 2008.

It is not clear whether she won or lost votes because she is married to our 42nd President, Bill Clinton.

While I think that both Hillary Rodham Clinton and Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg are outstanding human beings who bring added value to the political landscape, I am concerned about the notion of dynasties.

While these dynasties appeal to some, they raise the bar for African Americans, who represented just 2 percent of all elected officials in 2001, thus less likely to get the dynastic leg up than others.

If we grandfather political status by family, we are likely to perpetuate the underrepresentation of African Americans in local, state and national politics, who are less likely to get the dynastic leg up than others.

To be sure, there are African American dynasties.

Jesse Jackson, Jr. had a foundation from his dad's visibility and years of public service. Harold Ford, Jr., the former Congressman from Tennessee and 2006 candidate for that state's Senate seat, succeeded his father in Congress.

Kendrick Meek, from Florida, received the baton from his mother, the outstanding Carrie Meek. While Latinas are relative newcomers to the national political game, two sisters from California, Loretta and Linda Sanchez, now serve in Congress.

So people of color can do "dynasty," too. Should we? I have already heard people buzzing that Michelle Obama should run for President in 2016 (assuming two terms for Barack Obama), or that Malia and Sasha should consider Congress. Is that really what we want?

While the entry of Michelle, Sasha or Malia Obama into the political scene would be most exciting, political dynasties ultimately undermine the concept of democracy and a level playing field.

New York governor David Patterson is himself part of a political dynasty. His father, Basil Patterson, was a member of the New York State Senate, deputy mayor of New York City, and ultimately the first black Secretary of State in New York. If he selects Caroline Kennedy to succeed Hilary Clinton, I hope he also considers the value of an open democracy and makes his reason for selection clear. Sometimes political dynasties yield good candidates. Sometimes, though, they signal that our system is relatively closed to newcomers.

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Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg