

# OPINION/ FORUM

## THE CHRONICLE

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# POLICE AND THE NBTF

Talk about raining on one's parade.

There are a lot of angry folks as the result of the way the Winston-Salem Police Department handled what it called a chaotic situation on the last night of the National Black Theatre Festival. Things got so out hand that cops say they were forced to use pepper spray and a taser. Folks who were there, though, said that the legions of law enforcement officers on hand could have broken up any disturbances without resorting to their non-lethal weaponry.

Regardless of what happened, we fear that the reputation of the city and the NBTF will be harmed as a result the incident. Unfortunately, this all took place during the Closing Night Ceremony of the NBTF, which features a lively parade peopled with drummers, festival officials and scores of young people. Not only were there local people gathered on sidewalks that night to witness the parade, but also many, many out-of-town visitors, including several performers who starred in NBTF productions this year.



They must have thought that they had been transported to 1960s Birmingham, Ala., after witnessing scores of young people running through the streets of downtown, trying to escape the pepper spray fumes.

A taser was also used by at least one officer and some witnesses say officers made physical contact with some in the crowd. We can only imagine the stories that our visitors from New York, Los Angeles and all points in between are telling their friends and family members back home.

There is no question that officers had a tough job during the festival. Some teenagers were truly unruly, belligerent and obnoxious. Their unsupervised presence during the wee hours of the morning is yet another sign of the breakdown of our families. When a 13-year-old is hanging out on downtown street corners at 1 a.m., there is a problem. Perhaps cops should have unleashed the pepper spray and taser on these kids' parents.

But on the flip side, our law enforcement officers should be held to a much higher standard than a band of bad teens. We have no training in law enforcement, but still we question the apparent wanton use of pepper spray in such a setting. The spray affected everyone within the vicinity. So the law abiding folks, the vast majority of those downtown, went home feeling sick as a result of its use. Ironically, police officers just recently received tasers, and Police Chief Scott Cunningham vowed that the painful weapons would only be used when absolutely necessary. The Department says it is reviewing its actions that night. Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke is also demanding answers from the city manager. A thorough review is essential. There are people who feel that cops would have never acted this way during the RiverRun Film Festival, the Dixie Classic Fair, or other events where crowds are mostly or largely white.

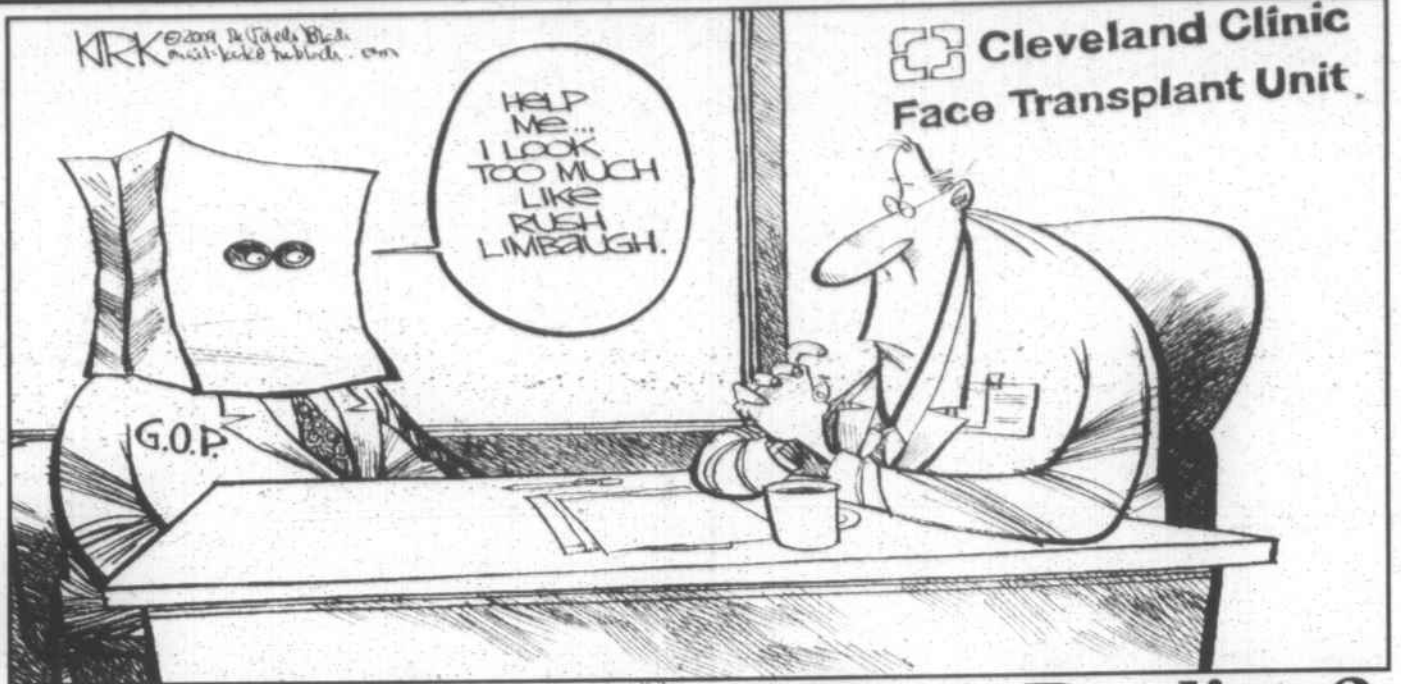
These questions, doubts and suspicions must be answered.

Submit letters and columns to:

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# Stuck in the '60s or Race Realists?



A. Peter Bailey  
 Guest Columnist

Numerous times since the emergence of President Barack Obama and "Transracialism" on the national scene, my skepticism about the whole process has led people to label me as "stuck in the '60s" in regards to race relations in this country.

This labeling has come mostly from young, Black folks, though even a few from my generation have joined in.

Well, after several recent incidents, including the banning of 65 Black and Latino youngsters from a swimming pool run by the Valley Swim Club because their presence "would change the complexion... and the atmosphere of

the club," I wonder if those same people still consider me "stuck in the '60s."

Is it being stuck in the 60s to believe that a White Harvard professor would not have been arrested as was Henry Louis Gates, Jr. at his own home, following his confrontation with White police officer, James Crowley? I am not a card-paying member of the Skip Gates fan club but it is obvious that he was arrested for being what many Whites call an "uppity" Black person who had the nerve to not be more deferential when addressing his "superior."

What fascinates me the most about these and other such incidents is the number of Black folks who express "shock" that such things can happen in this country in 2009. It is understandable that young Blacks under 30 may be shocked, because they have basically grown up in a fantasyland in regards to race relations. For those over 30, one can only wonder why

they are shocked at expressions of White supremacy/racism when that condition is an integral part of the country's past and present. No, it is not as overt as before, but it is still there, ready to rear its ugly head at any given moment. Those shocked Black folks should be made aware of a survey done by a University of Michigan professor which came to my attention in a 1991 editorial in the Richmond Afro-American newspaper. When asked what they considered true integration, Whites said 85 percent White, 15 percent Black with a White person always in charge; Blacks said 50-50 with a Black or White person in charge.

This explains why Whites such as Pat Buchanan, Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, Laura Ingram, Ann Coulter, Glenn Beck and all their viewers, readers and listeners responded with such venomous hysteria when President Obama said that the

police officer acted "stupidly" in the Gates case. Which, by the way, is not the same as saying that the cop is stupid.

It absolutely outrages such people that a Black man is in the White House, even a safe one like President Obama. And the fact that his wife is dark-skinned just adds to the outrage: Every time they see the Obamas in the White House carrying out their official duties, they simply lose it. The result is incidents such as the two mentioned above. It is highly likely that such expression of overt white supremacy/racism will become increasingly bolder. Which raises the question as to whether we Black folks are prepared to defend ourselves.

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# Another Side of Joe Jackson



George Curry  
 Guest Columnist

In the non-stop hoopla surrounding the death of Michael Jackson, Joe Jackson has become the person everyone loves to hate. TV commentators drop all pretense of objectivity by openly dismissing him as a kook. They make fun of his admittedly incoherent answers. And though he was later proven correct, they laughed at his assertion that Michael Jackson may have been killed.

What made me take a second look at Joseph Jackson was a statement he made on "Larry King Live." The elder Jackson said that he had recommended that his son be paid in euros rather than U.S. dollars for his upcoming concerts in London. That showed me that, as one of my elementary school teachers said, he was using his head for more than a hat rack.

And I began to think about what they said about the domineering fathers of Tiger Woods, Venus and Serena Williams and, in this case, the original Jackson Five. Yes, they were all pushy and ambitious fathers — so pushy that they pushed their children right to the top of their respective professions.

Of course, Joe Jackson's greatest claim to fame was not that he molded one of the most successful groups in music from the rough streets of Gary, Ind., but that he beat his kids. There were many stories told about Jackson pounding his kids with his fist when they made a mistake, of his throwing them against walls and, in one instance, holding Michael upside down by one leg and pummeling him.

If true, no one can condone such acts. However, lost in all the storytelling is that



Joe Jackson at his son's memorial service at the Staples Center on July 7.

the Jackson Five became the first American group to have their first four singles rocket to No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart. And Michael and Janet went on to stardom as solo artists. If you're going to talk about Joe Jackson, talk about the good as well as the bad.

The most interesting perspective of Joseph Jackson came from Michael in a fascinating speech he gave at Oxford University on March 21, 2001.

"You probably weren't surprised to hear that I did not have an idyllic childhood," he said. "The strain and tension that exists in my relationship with my own father is well documented. My father is a tough man and he pushed my brothers and me hard, from the earliest age, to be the best performers we could be. He had great difficulty showing affection. He never really told me he loved me. And he never really complimented

me either. If I did a great show, he would tell me it was a good show. And if I did an OK show, he told me it was a lousy show.

"He seemed intent, above all else, on making us a commercial success. And at that, he was more than adept. My father was a managerial genius and my brothers and I owe our professional success, in no small measure, to the forceful way that he pushed us. He trained me as a showman and under his guidance, I couldn't miss a step."

Looking at his father from the perspective of an adult, Michael said:

"I have started reflecting on the fact that my father grew up in the South, in a very poor family. He came of age during the Depression and his own father, who struggled to feed his children, showed little affection towards his family and raised my father and his siblings with an iron fist. Who could

have imagined what it was like to grow up a poor black man in the South, robbed of dignity, bereft of hope, struggling to become a man in a world that saw my father as subordinate? I was the first black artist to be played on MTV, and I remember how big a deal it was even then. And that was in the 80's!

"My father moved to Indiana and had a large family of his own, working long hours in the steel mills, work that kills the lungs and humbles the spirit, all to support his family. Is it any wonder that he found it difficult to expose his feelings? Is it any mystery that he hardened his heart, that he raised the emotional ramparts? And most of all, is it any wonder why he pushed his sons so hard to succeed as performers, so that they could be saved from what he knew to be a life of indignity and poverty?"

He explained, "I am forced to think of my own father, and despite my earlier denials, I am forced to admit that he must have loved me. He did love me, and I know that. There were little things that showed it."

Michael said for his own healing, he needed to forgive his father.

"I have begun to see that even my father's harshness was a kind of love, an imperfect love, to be sure, but love nonetheless. He pushed me because he loved me. Because he wanted no man ever to look down at his offspring. And now with time, rather than bitterness, I feel blessing. In the place of anger, I have found absolution. And in the place of revenge I have found reconciliation. And my initial fury has slowly given way to forgiveness."

If Michael Jackson could forgive his father, why can't everyone else?

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be