

# OPINION

## THE CHRONICLE

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### Our Mission

The Chronicle is dedicated to serving the residents of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County by giving voice to the voiceless, speaking truth to power, standing for integrity and encouraging open communication and lively debate throughout the community.

### How will you celebrate Black History Month?

In January, we celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Various organizations marked Dr. King's birthday in various ways, such as forums, service days and performances.

Now the attention turns to Black History Month. For many African-Americans, February is a month to take a look at where we have come from and how far we can go. It is a time to absorb the words of wise older people and marvel at the youth as they make presentations and learn about the past.

This year, February could be a crucial month to prepare for the history that could be made, history that has a bitter taste.

This year will mark the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law on Aug. 6.

In the 1960s, Americans of various hues joined black Americans in fighting against laws that made it hard for black Americans to register to vote. They marched and fought legal battles while they were attacked and some were killed. Then in 1965, the Voting Rights Act was signed into law. That changed the landscape for black Americans.

For instance, something that seems like an afterthought now was out of reach for black Americans before the '65 law. In the movie "Selma," it was pointed out that juries were all white because the jury pools were taken from voter registration lists. If black people aren't registered to vote, then they can't serve on juries. If they are not on juries, they can't review legal cases involving black people.

**"While any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to current conditions."**

Chief Justice John Roberts

Across the country and in North Carolina, new laws have been used to water down the federal law by requiring specific voter identification at the polls. The U.S. Supreme Court contributed to that effort by ruling in 2013 that nine states, mostly in the South, can change their election laws without advance federal approval, which they had to have before the ruling. The court, in a 5-4 decision, said the country has changed.

Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. wrote for the majority: "While any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to current conditions."

President Barack Obama urged the Republican-controlled Congress to restore Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, but congressional leaders have indicated that they have no intention of doing that.

Beginning in 2016, North Carolina will require voters to show a photo identification when they vote in person. The Voter Information Verification Act or "VIVA" (S.L. 2013-381) is the law that changes how North Carolinians can gain access to the polls to vote. Until 2016, most voters will not be required to show any form of identification when they vote.

So, why change the law if you don't need an ID now? 2016 will be the year a new president will be chosen. We all know what happened in 2008 and 2012: Barack Obama was elected the first black president of the United States and was re-elected to a second term. Who knows what could happen in 2016: The first woman president could be elected.

The fight against the North Carolina law already has begun. On Friday, Jan. 30, a hearing was held in Wake County court to hear critics of the law. North Carolina residents and voting-rights organizations argue that the voter ID law oversteps the bounds of the state Constitution.

So, as we celebrate Black History Month, we should take some time to really know our history and then prepare for the new history that will be made. Unfortunately, history is known to repeat itself.



### Black History becomes personal for me as journalist



Donna Rogers

Something to Talk About

I have been aware of Black History for a long time. I grew up in a household in which my parents and siblings made me aware of it. When I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I was aware of it. I gravitated toward the Black Student Movement and its newspaper, Black Ink.

When I became a professional journalist, I was aware of it. I had to cover the events during the month.

But it really hit me in 2008 just how one particular part of black history affected me. That piece of history involves the 1968 Kerner Report. I was part of a McCormick Fellows team that developed a presentation for a national audience at the 2008 UNITY journalists' convention. The forum included a DVD we pro-

duced. President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Kerner Commission, named after its chairman, Gov. Otto Kerner, Jr. of Illinois, to investigate the causes of the 1967 race riots nationwide and to provide recommendations for the future. The 11-member National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, as it is formally known, released its report on Feb. 29, 1968. The report is formally called the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.

I say the Kerner Report is a part of black history because it looked at the race riots, which occurred in black communities, and determined that the lack of black media professionals working at "mainstream media" companies to cover the black community helped foster the riots, so to prevent them from happening again, more black media professionals should be hired.

The report lambasted federal and state governments for failed housing, education and social-service policies, Wikipedia

says. The report also aimed some of its sharpest criticism at the mainstream media. "The press has too long basked in a white world looking out of it, if at all, with white men's eyes and white perspective."

I am a black media professional. So, this opened up doors for media companies to even think about hiring me.

I have been recruited by several white-owned newspapers on the premise that I would bring diversity to their operations. It sounded like the same premise the Kerner Commission was operating on.

My career went merrily along until the economic bottom fell out of the "mainstream media." Suddenly, it was not fashionable to recruit minorities. Who cared about diversity now?

Yet, I am still a black media professional.

At that point, I looked at another piece of black history: black newspapers.

I had learned in an African-American studies class about the Black Press. I still relish the textbook used. It led me into the world of black heroes and

she-roses, such as Ida B. Wells, who had to print her newspaper while running for her life.

I often thought of what it would be like to work for a black newspaper. Well, now I get to find out.

The Chronicle has been around for 40 years. It was built on the principles of the Black Press. The early Black Press spoke out for the underserved and the rights of black people. They covered the riots and the news that affected a population that has been through so much just to have basic rights.

The Chronicle had not been founded in 1967, but if it had been, it would have covered the riots in Winston-Salem. The black community would have gotten the story.

The Chronicle is dedicated to upholding the values of the Black Press. I'm blessed to be a part of this Black History.

Donna Rogers is managing editor of The Chronicle. To see the DVD on the Kerner Report, go to YouTube.com and search for "Kerner Plus 40: Change or Challenge."



### We Welcome Your Feedback

Submit letters and guest columns to [letters@wschronicle.com](mailto:letters@wschronicle.com) before 5 p.m. Friday for the next week's publication date.

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