

FORUM

Stop the trivialization and preservation of slavery and racism

Benjamin Chavis
Guest Columnist

As one of the co-founders of the evolving environmental justice movement worldwide, I am always interested in how some people today who have amassed billionaire financial status view racism, slavery and the issues of diversity and inclusion. But first, let me state for the record, I believe in economic empowerment and freedom for all people.

Especially for people of African descent who have experienced centuries of oppression and economic injustice, we should always be aware of the challenges and responsibilities to advance the cause of freedom and human dignity.

Usually the standard principles of preservation and conservation are used by people who are committed to caring for the protection of natural resources. Also conservationists and preservationists are supposed to help people to enjoy and appreciate the magnificent bounty of all

of creation. Wow, these are lofty terms.

So how is it that there is a billionaire named Louis Moore Bacon who prides himself as a conservationist, yet finds himself now at the center of expanding allegations of racist actions in the Bahamas as well as in the United States? Why would a very successful businessman whose family was involved in the founding and funding of the Confederacy prior to, during, and after the Civil War take unprecedented steps to "preserve" and "conserve" former slave plantations?

In fact, the National Audubon Society, one of the world's leading conservation organizations, is now weighing an urgent request to strip New York hedge fund giant Louis Bacon of an Audubon Society award that he received in 2013 for his work in the Bahamas. Bacon had attempted to preserve a historic slave plantation in the Bahamas and the Audubon Society originally thought that Bacon was up to something positive and good.

But in a recent letter to Audubon CEO David Yarnold, famed civil rights and high-powered African-American lawyer, William H. "Billy" Murphy Jr., has

challenged the Audubon Society and demanded that the unjustified award to Bacon be rescinded. Attorney Murphy represents Vivian Whyly, a 53-year-old native Bahamian of African descent whose ancestors were brought to the Bahamas in slave ships and then worked and died as slaves on the former Whyly Plantation at Clifton Point.

A relevant note is that Murphy also successfully represented the family of Freddie Gray this year after Gray died horrifically in Baltimore city police custody. According to Murphy, Bacon misrepresented the facts in getting the award and he also made racist comments in his acceptance speech at the Audubon ceremony. Allegedly Bacon went so far as to praise the slave-justifying novel "Gone with the Wind" as his "holy book."

"It was Mr. Whyly and a handful of other local activists who spearheaded the 1999 movement to turn the plantation into a heritage park," Murphy wrote in his letter. The truth is that many Bahamians took to the streets back in 2013 to protest the Audubon's actions concerning Bacon and his public proclivities

to trivialize the legacy and horror of the slavery of African people.

To my personal surprise as a result of some independent research about Louis Moore Bacon, I also found that he is spending a lot of

money in the state of North Carolina to "preserve" and renovate the Orton Slave Plantation in the southeastern region of the state. Orton Plantation at one time was one of the largest and most brutal slave plantations in North America.

Bacon's motives are not only questionable, but as more and more research is conducted by Harvard University Professor Henry Louis Gates and other scholars about the quantitative impact of the transatlantic slave trade on Africans and African-



Americans, we have to be vigilant and concerned about any scheme to desensitize, trivialize or to downplay the actual genocidal realities of African slavery.

The Audubon Society should immediately rescind the award to Bacon and should itself repent for improperly vetting what was actually happening in the Bahamas. Yet there is the larger looming issue: racism, slavery, injustice and inequality must be forever challenged. Each generation must rise to the occasion of advancing the

cause for freedom, justice, equality and empowerment.

No matter how much money someone may have, there is never a justification for the trivialization and preservation of slavery and racism.

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Black students at white universities harbor solidarity, seen and unseen

Mayeesa Mitchell
Guest Columnist

Over the last few weeks, students at colleges and universities across the country have stood in solidarity with Mizzou [the University of Missouri], a public university in Missouri that made national news when members of their football team threatened to forfeit the next game if the university president was not removed from his position.

Some of these schools were large public universities while others were small private ones. Some, like UNCG [the University of North Carolina at Greensboro], Davidson College and Wesleyan University are located in North Carolina while the others are located on both coasts and everywhere in between.

Some had 15 people come out in support while others had crowds of 60 or more. Despite their differences, all of the

rallies and demonstrations had one goal — to make administrators understand that their lack of vigilance when it comes to issues that affect students of color is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

As a student at High Point University [HPU], where only 5 percent of the 4,200 students on campus identify themselves as African-American, I truly understand what they are fighting for.

In the age of colorblindness, HPU, which is the perfect university in many regards, often doesn't see the need to address issues that affect students of color. Issues like: increasing diversity of faculty members so we also have the opportunity to learn from professors who look like us and creating a multicultural office so students of color feel that they have somewhere to call their own on campus.

Although students on my campus have not had a public demonstration of our solidarity with Mizzou, we have been fighting toward the same goal for many years. The process is slow and required us to learn and work within the corporate hierarchies, while also pushing the invisible

boundaries.

To my knowledge, there haven't been blatant racist acts like Halloween parties where students wear black face, the denial of students of color into sororities or racial obscenities said to students on my campus, but there have been many acts of micro-aggressions.

Throughout my four years at HPU, there have certainly been improvements. Nothing as drastic as the president stepping down, but small victories like an increase in the students of color on the campus and an acknowledgement of the need for a multicultural center.

While fighting to raise awareness about diversity issues on campus, my classmates and I have not left it solely to the administration. By instituting events like Diversity Week, administering forums on race relations and going against our school's conservative background by having "Orange Is The New Black" actress and LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered] activist Lea Delaria speak on campus using financial assistance from the SGA [Student Government

Association], we have made the beginning strides in creating a university that encourages and celebrates diversity of thought.

I admire the solidarity that was demonstrated by the students at Mizzou. Their demands were heard, met and most importantly sparked necessary change across the country.

My experience at HPU has taught me that sometimes change is quiet, slow and subtle. My solidarity isn't demonstrated in boisterous rallies, but it is still there. It is just as strong and just as powerful.

To the students of color at Mizzou, we the students of color at High Point University stand with you in solidarity.

Mayeesa Mitchell is an intern with The Chronicle this semester. She is a senior at High Point University majoring in Journalism and Business Administration. She has been involved in diversity efforts at HPU since her freshman year. After graduation, she plans to work as a print journalist and continue advocating for civil rights.

N.C. numbers show high food insecurity

Chris Fitzsimon
Guest Columnist

Chris Fitzsimon, founder and executive director of N.C. Policy Watch, writes the weekly column called "Monday numbers," which provides numerical facts on a topic each week.

Numbers on food insecurity

*14.7: average percentage of households in the United States that experienced food insecurity each year from 2012-2014 (Hunger and poverty fact sheet, Feeding America)

*16.7: average percentage of households in North Carolina that experienced food insecurity each year from 2012-2014 (Hunger and poverty fact sheet, Feeding America)

*9: rank of North Carolina among the 50 states in the highest levels of food insecurity (Hunger in North Carolina, The North Carolina Association of Feeding America Food Banks)

*26.1: percentage of children in North Carolina under 18 who are food insecure on a regular basis (Ibid)

*160,000: number of people in North Carolina who receive emergency food assistance in any given week (Ibid)

81: percentage of NC households receiving food assistance that don't know where their next meal is coming



from (Ibid)

36: percentage of food pantries in North Carolina that have turned people away because they have no food to give them (Ibid)

73: percentage of North Carolina households served by food banks that have had to choose between paying for food and paying for health care or medicine. (Ibid)

75: percentage of North Carolina households served by food banks that have had to choose between buying food and heating their homes. (Ibid)

61: percentage of North Carolina families served by food banks that have been forced to choose between paying for food and paying for housing. (Ibid)

22: percentage of North Carolina families served by food banks that have a member who has served in the military (Ibid)

6: percentage of North Carolina families served by food banks that have a member currently serving in the military (Ibid)

105,000: number of low-income adults in North Carolina who will lose food aid in 2016 thanks House Bill 318, the "Protect North Carolina Workers Act," signed by Gov. Pat McCrory that will bar state officials from applying for a federal waiver to allow people to continue to receive federal food benefits. (Up to 105,000 childless adults in North Carolina would lose food aid in 2016 if legislators prohibit new waiver, Progressive Pulse, September 25, 2015)

83: number of counties in North Carolina where there are more jobless workers than job openings ("Unbelievable: Last minute bill would limit food assistance, expand hunger in NC," Progressive Pulse, September 24, 2015)

Chris Fitzsimon, founder and executive director of N.C. Policy Watch, writes the daily Fitzsimon File, delivers a radio commentary broadcast on WRAL-FM and hosts "News and Views," a weekly radio news magazine that airs on multiple stations across North Carolina. Reach him at chris@ncpolicywatch.com or 919-861-2066.