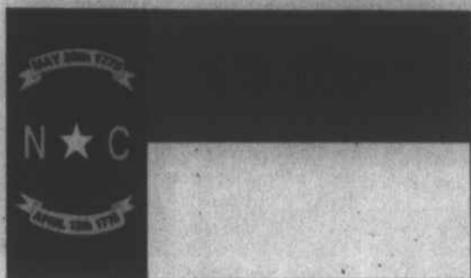


FORUM

Remaking history for North Carolina's women of color



Gladys Robinson
Guest Columnist

[Editor's note: March is National Women's History Month.]

Black History

Month is a time to recall the struggles of people of color in our country and to celebrate accomplishments in racial, economic and social justice that bring us all closer to the vision of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness promoted by our founders.

We are reminded today, as we daily witness economic hardship, the aftermath of gun violence, mass incarceration, and rising inequality that enriches the one percent at the expense of our middle class, that these struggles are not just part of the past, but also shape the future.

No one is more impacted by the historical legacies of racism, sexism, classism and oppression than women of color, who continue to face persistent barriers and obstacles on every issue from fair pay and affordable health care to quality education and the wealth gap that we've seen historically. To make the kind of real progress that changes our history moving forward, we need a deliberate effort to address these issues and our approach must lead with race, class and gender.

In 2016, we need more than resolutions and political rhetoric to fix the economy and address inequality in our state; we need a plan. Now is the time for our elected leaders to make sure that they understand and are working for the people they

represent. They need to be working with colleagues and advocates to take meaningful action on the policy priorities that will help make the lives better for those who are most struggling in our current economy: women, particularly women of color, and their families.

For too long, women have been left behind in economic and workplace policies, even as they become more prominent in the economy, the workplace and in public life. Women today are half of all others, half of the workforce and increasingly leading households as sole breadwinners for their families. But although the economy has changed tremendously because of increased participation from women, our workplace policies and legislative priorities have not kept up.

Women remain unequal to men when it comes to every economic indicator. Not only have women not reached parity at work in terms of pay, leadership positions, or promotions, but women face constant attacks on their reproductive options, with little acknowledgement that if, when and how many children a woman has is a primary indicator of her economic status. In North Carolina, on average, a woman who holds a full-time job is paid \$33,459 per year while a man who holds a full-time job is paid \$41,950 per year. This means that women in North Carolina are paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to men, amounting to a yearly gap of \$8,491 between men and women who work full time in the state. That gap is even wider for black women and Latina women. Because of North Carolina politicians refusal to fully implement the Affordable Care Act and provide women preventive health care including

birth control, women are less able to control their economic fates or to make basic decisions about their families.

Public policy can have a real impact on people's lives. We expect our elected leaders to resolve to tackle issues that matter to families, like access to affordable childcare and paid family leave.

Parents, particularly single working mothers, have few affordable child-care options. Over 65 percent of all children have both parents in the workforce, yet the cost of child-care for families is increasing. The cost of childcare is more than rent in many places and a four-year education at a public university.

Since women more often have to take time off from work to care for children and for aging relatives, they face additional discrimination and lower earnings as a result of lost wages. About 20 percent of all women in the United States have or will provide at least part-time care to an elderly or disabled relative, family member or friend, and many will do so by sacrificing their own earning potential or retiring early. In fact, the average female caregiver loses \$40,000 more in lost wages and Social Security benefits than the average male caregiver.

Although having children clearly carries real economic consequences for women and their families, attacks on women's reproductive health care access to decide when, how and if to have children is at an all time high. More anti-woman state laws were passed last year than in the previous three years, with even more proposed for this year. Politically motivated attacks on Planned Parenthood, the leading provider of family planning

services in the country, erodes access to reproductive health care and endangers women's ability to determine the size of their families as well as their economic security. These attacks do the greatest damage to poor women and women of color who often face the greatest economic barriers to getting birth control and abortion and depend most on providers like Planned Parenthood for everything from contraception to preventative health care.

This year, our state legislature must move forward on the priorities of women and families rather than spending the session turning back the clock on reproductive health care, starting with the most impacted women: low-income women of color. We must insist in 2016 that every lawmaker stand with women and families by protecting reproductive health care, advancing equal pay for equal work, and passing paid leave and childcare policies that enable women to take care of their families. And, we must be clear that any politician who wants to focus on a narrow, partisan agenda to distract us from this plan is standing in the way of progress not just for women, but for the whole state.

By working together to stand with women and families in the legislative session, we can be on the right side of history by increasing equity for all women, particularly women of color. Together, we can build a North Carolina legacy worthy of celebration.

Gladys Ashe Robinson is a health services executive and a Democratic State Senator for the 28th district (Guilford County). She serves as the Deputy Minority Leader in the North Carolina General Assembly.

Clinton or Sanders: What Would Dr. King Say?



Bill Turner
Guest Columnist

Most blacks who will vote in the Democrat primaries for the 2016 presidential campaign would vote for Bernie Sanders if they followed the logic of a speech Dr. Martin Luther King gave in NYC's Riverside Church on April 4, 1967. In candid and unpretentious language in a speech titled "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," Dr. King spoke about the straight correlation between income inequality at home and the inclination toward war abroad. His words were quite revolutionary and condemned widely. The policies proposed by Democrat presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders, especially his resolute focus on "a political revolution," rebounds from the echo chamber of Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In a little-known speech delivered a year before he was killed, Dr. King made clear that he was much more than a mesmerizing dreamer, a pragmatist, a run-of-the-mill centrist or a simple reformer, labels Sanders puts on his rival, Hillary Clinton.

Although then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had already labeled him "the most dangerous man in America," Dr. King, speaking before a group called Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, revealed himself as a revolutionary. "We are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us. I call for radical departures."

Of the Vietnam War, King said - as Sanders is heard to say about the present-day tendency America has to be the world's police - "We are a society gone mad on war, and America will never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continue to draw



Clinton

men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So, I am increasingly compelled to see this war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such."

King wondered aloud about young black men who "were sent eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem." Such a remark was revolutionary, especially to black ministers who thought the civil rights movement was a separate issue from the anti-war movement. Dr. King doubled down, calling the Vietnam War "a cruel manipulation of the poor."



Sanders

Like Dr. King's reference to "Americans as strange liberators," candidate Sanders says "The test of a great and powerful nation is not how many wars it can engage in, but how it can resolve international conflicts in a peaceful manner. I will move away from a policy of unilateral military action and regime change, and toward a policy of emphasizing diplomacy, and ensuring the decision to go to war is a last resort."

When Sanders calls for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, he is pointing to our fellow Americans whom Dr. King called "God's desperate, rejected, suffering, helpless and outcast children, the weak, the

voiceless, the victims of our nation."

Sanders takes his call for revolution from the words of the late John F. Kennedy who in 1962 said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable." King repeated those words five years later, going on to challenge "those who make peaceful revolution impossible by refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investments. I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values." Dr. King headed toward his planned "Poor Peoples Campaign" in 1968, a year after this speech focused then on conquering what he called "the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism."

It's easy to celebrate Dr. King's preaching every January; it's another to support a politician like Sanders, who dreams as he

did. That requires revolutionary resolve. Bernie Sanders promotes policies that are logical extensions of where Dr. King was headed before he was silenced in Memphis: the gap between the very rich and everyone else, a livable minimum wage, universal health insurance, protection of the environment, and reins on corporate greed. Sanders seeks to lead a peaceful political revolution of the magnitude of Dr. King's Dream, at the end point of which "justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." Somebody needs to tell Democrat voters, especially blacks, who see Secretary Clinton, not Senator Sanders, as the practical way to realize The Dream. Apparently Dr. King - in the form of Bernie Sanders - is still way ahead of his time.

Dr. Bill Turner is a noted educator, writer and thinker who called Winston-Salem home for many years. Reach him at bill-turner@comcast.net.

Carl Wesley Matthews: A remembrance and appreciation



John T. Llewellyn
Guest Columnist

Carl Wesley Matthews died Friday at the age of 84. With his passing, Winston-Salem has lost a giant of moral courage. It was Carl who sat in alone on Feb. 8, 1960 at the Kress lunch counter at Fourth and Liberty, awaiting service. His courage was a beacon: 11 students from then-Winston Salem Teachers College joined him. The beacon shone even brighter: 10 students from then-Wake Forest College joined in. The demonstration continued; the group, now numbering more than 20, was arrested on Feb. 23 and taken to jail.

The act of liberating the community's conscience was undertaken by Carl Matthews, and his example drew students promoting change and demonstrating goodwill - Blacks and Whites together. It is easy to forget the real danger and the palpable hatred that could be unleashed by this simple act of conscience.

One week before Carl acted, the now world-famous Greensboro sit-in had begun with four North Carolina A&T college students. That watershed moment is rightly memorialized with a downtown museum. For some, Winston-Salem's confrontation on the same issue may seem to be a footnote. Two points contradict that view: Segregation was a battle to be fought town-to-town. A change in Greensboro's lunch counters would mean

nothing for Winston-Salem unless people in Winston-Salem insisted on a similar change here. The second point is, this: it was Winston-Salem, not Greensboro, where lunch counters were first desegregated. The Winston-Salem change came on May 25, 1960; Carl returned to the lunch counter and was served, 107 days after he first sat down. This observation takes nothing away from Greensboro; it is simply to say that Winston-Salem did the right thing first - even if City fathers were reluctant. Carl Matthews and his student followers brought our city to its senses with a simple but very dangerous demonstration of moral courage. It is this man who embodied the best in the pursuit of social justice who we lost last week.

I met Carl nearly 20

years ago when my wife helped to organize a city-wide event recognizing the veterans of the 1960 sit-in. In all the years from 1960 through 2000, no one in the community had formally recognized Carl Matthews or the students of Winston-Salem State University and Wake Forest University. Four decades without comment sends its own message. The two-day symposium, exactly 40 years after the arrests, involved city government and both universities. It woke the city up to its own history. Carl and the students were honored; a historical marker recounting their story was unveiled and stands today on Fourth Street, opposite the old county office building. A documentary film, "I'm Not My Brother's Keeper: Leadership and Civil Rights in Winston-Salem, North Carolina,"

told the story of the students and the sit-in. It was broadcast on public television and is available in public libraries.

This loss is also personal as my family values its long-standing friendship with Carl Matthews and Sharon Rucker. Occasional dinners, and holiday and graduation cards were reminders of how our lives entwined. My children got to know first-hand a man who was the embodiment of morality and dignity and an exemplar of living his faith, even in the face of public resistance. What a gift for them and their generation. The current presidential campaign and a front-runner who will not reject support from the Ku Klux Klan suggests that we are going to need another generation inspired by Carl's courage.

When Carl stood to leave the Kress store on the first day of the sit-in he quietly recited the 23rd Psalm. From the Blacks and Whites assembled came other voices, joining in. It concluded with a loud and multi-voiced "Amen." Carl's story confirms that even in times of tension - then and now - people of faith and goodwill can build a path to brotherhood. Dr. King observed, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." In our community, Carl Wesley Matthews should always be honored and remembered as the man who reached up and pulled that arc toward the city of Winston-Salem and social justice. Rest in Peace, my friend.

John T. Llewellyn is associate professor of communication at Wake Forest University.