

# The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

A subsidiary of Consolidated Media Group  
1531 Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203

Gerald O. Johnson  
CEO/PUBLISHER

Robert Johnson  
CO-PUBLISHER/  
GENERAL MANAGER

Herbert L. White  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

## Capital's loss is personal

### Taking home rule away from Washington voters hurts all of us

By Eleanor Holmes Norton  
THE WASHINGTON POST

At a time when unity of purpose is indispensable, we are in danger of becoming a city of polar choices. At least some people are so outraged by the loss of home rule rights that they even disparage the president's rescue package. Yet the president's plan was unrelated to the anti-home rule attachment. Instead, he proposed (but Congress did not enact) the elimination of the D.C. congressional appropriation committees, which have been responsible for almost all violations of home rule over the years. Without this rescue from pension liability and from state functions — which District officials requested — this city was on its way to becoming hopelessly underfunded or permanently insolvent.

In contrast, two recent articles in the Aug. 17 Outlook section (of The Washington Post) accept the premise that the only way to fix this city was to turn in home rule. David Nicholson ["Shame and Blame"] traces Marion Barry's failures as mayor to his origins in the civil rights movement and throws me in for good measure with an ad hominem attack repeatedly clothed in race.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, chaired by my colleague, Rep. John Lewis, when I was active (John was one of the civil rights leaders who spoke at the 1963 March on Washington), was, according to Nicholson, "not...nonviolent but a combative Black Power offshoot." Race has not been (and must not become) an issue in the current home rule controversy, but Nicholson's piece is about nothing but race. His piece is a case study in how to incite division rather than repair the city.

Patricia Eaton ["Get a Grip, Eleanor"] believes that I apologized for my work on the rescue package, that I no longer support it (Nicholson believes this too) and that I feel an obligation "to show solidarity with Barry." What? I certainly did not apologize, but I should now — for gross miscommunication of where I stand.

Ironically, the origin of the flawed communication was my relief that we had saved the critical financial provisions of the plan. Medicaid and pension relief almost didn't make it whole into the package. I briefed the press on the good news before the dust had settled on the bad news. I knew that home rule had not come out whole, but, lacking the full details, I concentrated on the "big win." I should have warned that there might also be a big loss. When I spoke soon after of "a shameful act," it did not occur to me that anyone would think I meant the financial package (rather than the anti-home rule attachment) I had just praised and had worked so hard to achieve.

Initially, I did not expect so deep a move against home rule, but I was not surprised that the obvious management problems of the city would arise during the negotiations. For many months, I had repeatedly asked city officials and the control board to do more than talk about the "transformation plan" (Mayor Barry) and the "strategic plan" (control board) but actually to tackle city operations. Nevertheless, in the negotiations, I thought I was prepared with a tested way to solve the city's considerable management problems without taking down more home rule. The only rapid and significant signs of change in any city agency have been in the Metropolitan Police Department, including a 17 percent reduction in crime and 400 officers put on the streets from behind their desks. This model became my counterproposal during negotiations both because it was working and because no home rule changes had been necessary. Sen. Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.) ultimately accepted this approach, and it would have done the job, as it is doing in the police department. However, he insisted upon changes in the authority of elected officials that had not been necessary to achieve the changes in the police.

Some are said to cheer the extinguishing of their rights. I do not believe that. I believe that the cheers reflect exasperation with Mayor Barry and other city officials about the condition of the city. People don't cheer about losing their rights — in the District or anywhere else on the planet. Sometimes, though, they grow weary enough to look for relief from any source.

As a fourth-generation Washingtonian and a committed democrat, I find the loss of home rule deeply humiliating. The message to the world is that even with a control board, we couldn't get it together. My family was here when the District lost home rule under Boss Shepherd. For me, the loss is personal. The difference may be that many residents today appear to associate home rule with Mayor Barry and the present D.C. government. I have never identified democracy and self-government here or elsewhere with any person or administration. In consistently fighting for home rule, I have always thought that I was fighting for D.C. residents, not the D.C. government.

Let's waste no more time. I hope residents on the "management side" and residents on the "home rule side" will help form an "action now side." Action is the only way to fix the city. Action is the only realistic way to retrieve home rule.

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON is Washington, D.C. delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives.

## Test giver, heal thyself first

By Carol Jago  
THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

News that verbal SAT scores showed no growth nationally came as no surprise to me. I have been frustrated for years by poor performance from smart kids who, in my professional opinion, should do much better. We must be doing something wrong. In an effort to shed some light on what that something was, a few months ago I sat for the exam myself.

The air inside the shabby classroom shimmered with tension. Both proctor and teenage test-takers had far too much on their minds to notice the presence of an unlikely, 40-something candidate sitting for this exam. I sharpened my pencils, set my watch on the desk the way I saw other students doing and tried to focus on the droning instructions being read aloud. It wasn't easy.

The logic behind putting myself through this ordeal was to experience what sitting for the SAT II felt like for my students and to figure out how well high school curriculum matched the skills required for these high-stakes tests. I have always taken a rabid anti-test-prep stance. I believed course work in English should remain pure, focusing on literary analysis and development of student writing. I was sure that such instruction prepared my students just fine for any qualifying exams they would ever have to face.



The SAT II subject tests that I was sitting for used to be known as achievement tests. They are hour-long, primarily multiple-choice tests in specific subjects. Unlike the SAT I, which measures general abilities, these tests measure students' knowledge of particular subjects and their ability to apply that knowledge. Many colleges, including the University of California, require that applicants submit scores for these tests, one of which often must be the writing exam. Most of the students I talked with in line outside the test center were juniors in high school taking three tests at one sitting, typically writing, mathematics and chemistry or biology.

I am delighted to report that current high school curriculum in writing, properly executed,

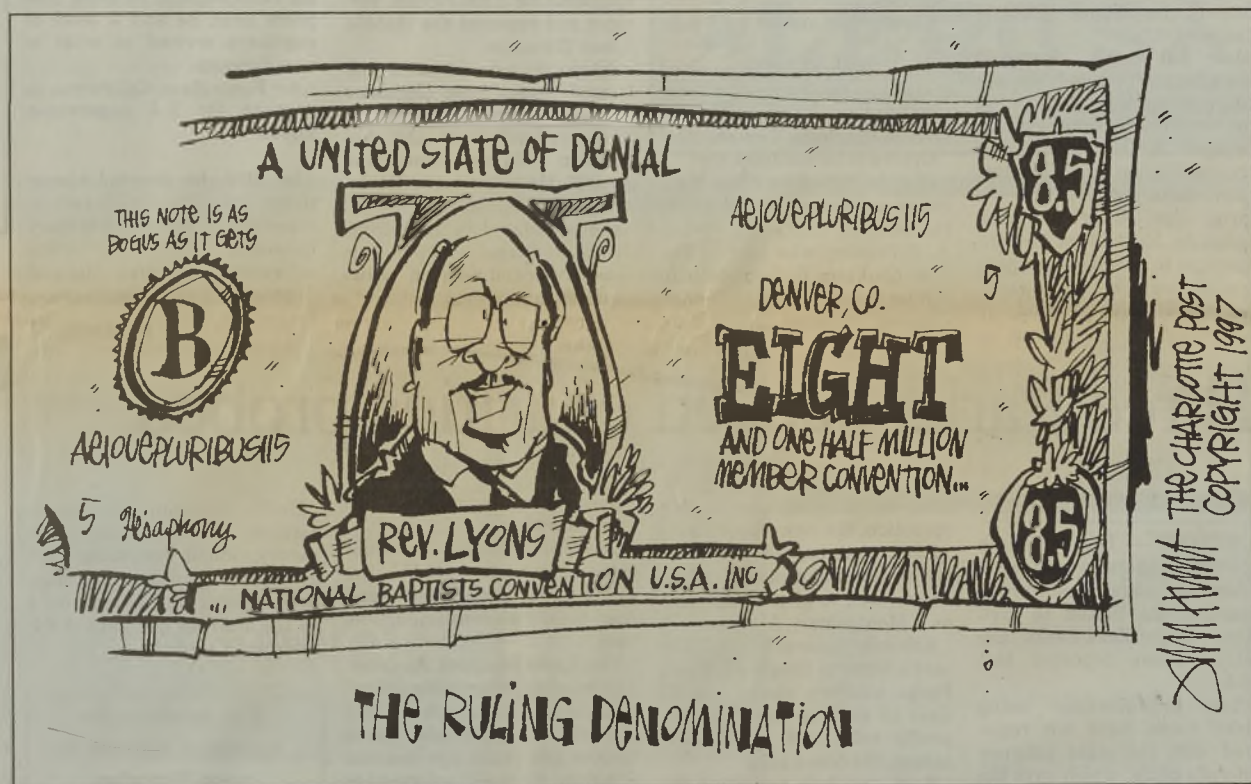
prepares students extremely well for the portion of the writing exam in which they actually are asked to write. The questions are similar to the writing assignments students often face in school. The rubric used to evaluate the writing sample is congruent with what most teachers have been using for years. The biggest challenge for test-takers is the length of time allotted: 20 minutes to plan and execute their essays. The literature test is made up of five passages or poems. Students must read and answer multiple-choice questions based on each text. The literature was chosen from a broad range of authors and time periods. My exam included a passage from Bharati Mukherjee's "Jasmine," a portion of a Zora Neale Hurston essay and a John

Donne poem. Again, I think this reflects the blend of classical and contemporary literature that is being taught in most high school classrooms.

But the news is not all good. The multiple-choice portion of the writing test is brutal. According to the College Board, the test "measures students' ability to express ideas effectively in standard written English, to recognize faults in usage and structure and to use language with sensitivity to meaning." Even after working through several practice tests, I found the errors that I was being asked to identify subtle and confusing. I know that I have not adequately prepared my students to face such questions.

For years, I have taught skills within the context of student writing, correcting their sentences and discussing commonly made errors with the whole class. The weakness of this method is that many students never generate the kind of complex constructions the SAT requires them to analyze. This does not mean that we should return to a drill and worksheet approach to teaching English. But we do need to be more systematic and intentional about how we teach students the structure of their language.

CAROL JAGO teaches at Santa Monica High School and directs the California Reading and Literature Project at University of California at Los Angeles. Her e-mail is: Jago@seis.ucla.edu



## An apology — sort of — to NAACP

By Wiley A. Hall III  
BALTIMORE AFRO-AMERICAN

When NAACP president and chief executive officer Kweisi Mfume responded to my criticism of his organization with a stinging letter to the editor Aug. 2, my first impulse was to ignore it.

"Oh please!" I sneered, and tossed the offending document aside. (I missed the trashcan, but of course that's not because my aim is poor; letters that are critical of me just aren't very aerodynamic.)

My next impulse was to reply in-kind. Mr. Mfume accused me of writing in "typically incorrect fashion," of having a "hatred of the NAACP" that "is clear in every article he has written," and of seemingly being incapable of "writing about the facts and not the fiction." Mr. Mfume knows those charges are not true, of course, but this is just the kind of snappy repartee we columnists love.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Does he really think he can trade barbs with me?" I may never have been good at playing the dozens on the playground, but I'm hell on wheels with pen and paper. I once called a critic a "galumphing old jingoist," a "silly, nitpicking, quibbling little pettifogger," and by golly my victim fell to his

knees and begged for mercy.

But at last I considered the substance of Mr. Mfume's complaint. And upon reflection, I realize that I owe the NAACP an apology.

In a July 19 column I said the NAACP behaves as though its letters stand for the "National Association for the Advancement of Celebrity People." This was after the organization presented boxing promoter Don King with its President's Award during the NAACP's annual national convention in Pittsburgh last month. Last year, I noted, the slinking, prancing, lipstick and eyeliner-wearing artist formerly known as Prince was presented with the organization's Image Award.

Are these truly the heroes of our community? I wondered. Are these the kind of people who exemplify the values of the NAACP?

But I forgot — and Mr. Mfume has kindly and oh, so gently reminded me — that it is not the NAACP that focuses on celebrities, but the mainstream media.

I did not attend the NAACP's national convention in Pittsburgh. Had I done so, I would have seen so much that was powerful, inspirational, and positive, that the award to Don King would have been worth little more than a footnote, if I mentioned it at all.

But those of my colleagues in the media who attended the convention apparently ignored the hundreds of young adults who are working to improve their communities through their local NAACP branches; the hundreds



King

of adult men and women who give of themselves selflessly; and even the dozens of workshops addressing critical issues such as how to strengthen and preserve our families. None of those were worth mentioning in the media's eyes. They focused instead on a relatively insignificant event — Mr. Mfume's award to the notorious Don King. The media often focuses on the ridiculous and the profane in our community and this distorts the reality of what we are all about.

African American journalists such as myself have a particular responsibility to look beneath the headlines and portray our people, our community, and our organizations and institutions as they really are.

So, I apologize. I failed to look beneath the surface. Lord knows, the NAACP is not perfect. But I doubt that either Don King or the

artist formerly known as Prince were honored because they are fine fellows. They were thanked, publicly, for contributing to the organization. Every organization must do this, otherwise contributions from wealthy donors would wither and disappear. And as my friend Eddie puts it, "the NAACP cannot depend on penny-pinching knuckleheads like Wiley Hall for money."

Sad, but true. So, I'll say again (and for the last time) that I was wrong. I did not consider the entire picture and I have an obligation to do so. But I don't want any of you to think I am a pushover for apologizing. I do not wish to see a flood of critical letters to the editors. The next person who messes with me will get called a "goat-headed blowhard," a "pea-brained fuddy-duddy," a "pie-faced, bug-eyed, self-serving hypocrite."

I'll write that your mother wears combat boots and that you were born in a test tube marked "failure." I'll report that when the Lord gave out brains, you thought He said "rain" and covered your head with an umbrella.

I'm warning you: Never, ever presume to bandy words with the power of the press.

WILEY A. HALL III is a columnist with the Baltimore Afro-American.