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What's the lesson from tragedy?

By Earl Leake
SPECIAL TO THE POST

There have been much written and spoken about the recent deaths of seven teenagers, resulting from joyriding in a single automobile and pursued by a Troutman police officer. We have heard from the somewhat less compassionate, "I know where my child is at 10 o'clock at night", and those who would question the police officer for his role. Should he have pursued the kids, even if they were breaking the law? Also, those attempting to advance their political careers have surfaced.

What is concerning about the above is, as the investigation began looking into how and why this occurred, we immediately started assessing blame. We referenced the socio-economic environment in which a number of the teenagers lived - "a community of small, single-family homes ravaged by poverty and drugs."

First of all, the use of illegal drugs should never be acceptable behavior, but to date, it doesn't appear that drugs played a part in the accident. Also where an individual lands on the economic ladder, above or below the poverty line, does not explain why seven kids would pile into an automobile and go joyriding. They could have easily been residents of south Charlotte, where licensed youths have been fatally injured in auto accidents due to excessive speed, substance abuse, in the wee hours of the morning.

Although a point worth stating, this commentary is not about how this terrible tragedy times seven was reported, but the way some in the Statesville/Troutman area are responding in a positive manner. It can be summed up by Pastor Glenn Usry of Christian Outreach, "Now is not the time to blame anybody for anything. Now is the time to heal wounds and to help." Also, what is the lesson to be learned from such an unfortunate tragedy?

I have often said, nearly anyone can be a biological parent if their reproductive system works, but it takes time, commitment and a lot of effort to be a true parent. This is more evident today than at any other time in our history. Our children are exposed to so much that the parental guiding hand is a must. Nothing should stop us from providing that guidance. When the late actor Carroll O'Connor of "In the Heat of the Night" fame was trying to address his son's drug addiction problems, he said "get between your child and drugs anyway you can." In other words, nothing is more important than being there when our children need us the most.

Our pace in life is frantic, trying to pay the mortgage or rent, juggling two jobs at times, and addressing other needs. No parent, absolutely no parent, would knowingly place their children in danger. Although the lack of knowledge, insight or "parental instinct" can never be a sufficient explanation for what happened to these seven young people.

When God blesses us and places a child in our care we have the responsibility to learn what we need to know and to prioritize that responsibility in our lives. This is not an indictment of the parents, but a call for all parents to examine where our kids are in our priorities.

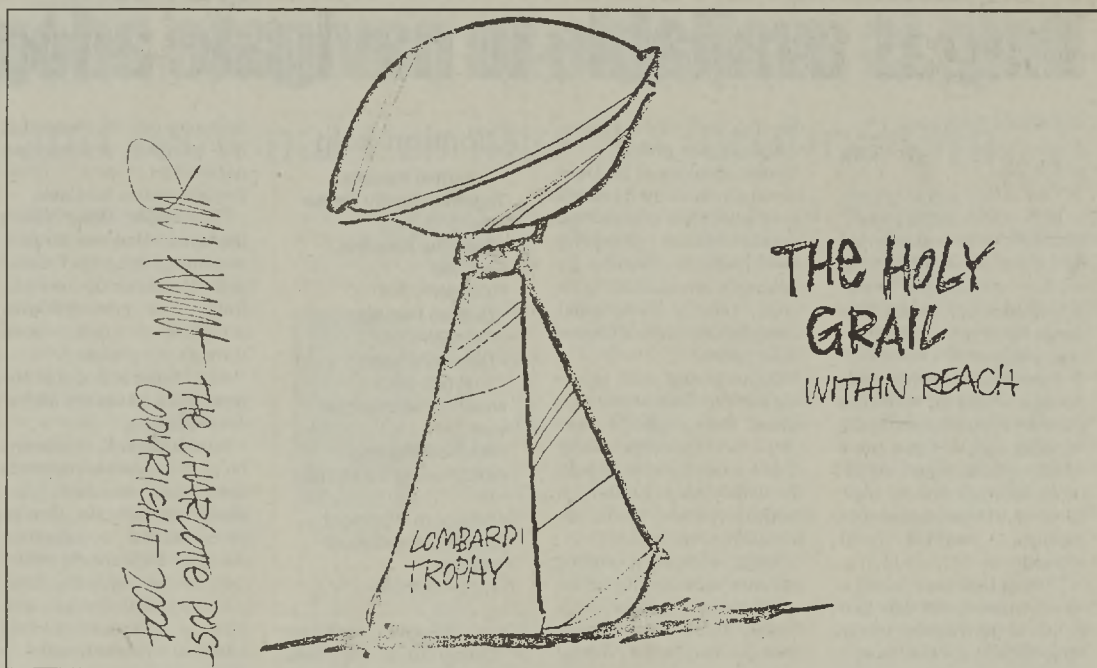
As a parent of a teenager, I know she did not come with a "how to" manual. As teenagers approach adulthood, there are more challenges for parents. There is nothing wrong with seeking assistance and counseling to help work through the huge responsibilities of parenting a teenager.

In the African-American community, we talk a great deal about how it takes a total village to raise a child. It's a catchy and worthwhile statement. It would be more effective if it were practiced more. This is far from a criticism, but as adults, we need to understand the pressures on our children, and collaborative parenting can be helpful. Our children are going to make mistakes and do wrong things. What we don't want to happen is for those indiscretions to cost them their lives. So when Eugene Arnold possibly saved his son's life by refusing to permit him to go joyriding with his friends, there was an opportunity for him to get between those seven kids and the tragedy. What could he have done? Anything and everything necessary to change a potentially dangerous situation that unfortunately became reality.

Howard Hunt, one of the unfortunate dads of one of the seven fatally injured teens, acknowledged his son and friends had previously borrowed cars to go joyriding. The assumption by Mr. Hunt was probably that someone had a driver's license, knowing his son did not, and the car was truly borrowed and not stolen as reported. This is where knowing your children's friends become so important. Although our teenagers would accuse us of "grilling" them, if it saves their lives, they will at least be around to complain about it.

So as the community heals with the help of Pastor Usry and others and we offer up our prayers for their recovery, let's be motivated by the mother who in so much anguish lamented about her late son, "someone please wake him up. He was only 13."

It is this cry that should be etched in our minds not to place blame, but propel us to find solutions. That would be the ultimate lesson learned.



Connerly maligns black colleges

GEORGE E. CURRY



It's getting to be axiomatic: If Ward Connerly attacks a program or institution, you can be assured that it is serving a valuable purpose for African Americans.

We've seen this with the black conservative's anti-affirmative action crusades in California and now he's attacking black colleges.

Writing recently in the Congressional Quarterly Researcher, Connerly says, "...Directly opposed to the diversity ideal are historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). An HBC's entire reason for being is to not be diverse."

That's plain ignorant. Black colleges were established during the Reconstruction era because many white universities would not accept African-American students. Southern states were so determined to maintain racial segregation that they offered to pay the tuition of blacks who wanted to attend a northern university. Legally-sanctioned racism

caused black colleges to come into existence.

As Bill Gray, president and CEO of the United Negro College Fund, correctly observes, black colleges are far more diverse than majority White institutions of higher education.

"Over 13 percent of students at HBCUs are white while fewer than 6 percent of students at white colleges are black," he wrote in the November issue of the CQ Researcher. "More than 25 percent of faculty at HBCUs are white compared to less than 4 percent of black faculty at white colleges. More than 10 percent of deans and administrators at HBCUs are white compared to 2 percent at white institutions who are black."

Connerly - who led the successful movement to eliminate affirmative action from the University of California higher education system - is even more disingenuous by blaming the existence of black colleges rather than his actions for the paucity of black students in California universities.

"...It is hypocritical to support the public funding of HBCUs and then turn around and criticize a 'lack of diversity' at other public colleges and universities, since

HBCUs, by their very nature, draw away many black students who would otherwise attend racially mixed schools and affect their 'diversity,'" Connerly writes.

HBCUs represent only 3 percent of the nation's 3,688 institutions of higher education. More than 85 percent of all black students attend predominantly white colleges. So, the problem clearly isn't that black colleges are draining black students from majority white universities.

What is telling is that although black colleges represent just 3 percent of the nation's colleges, they produce 24 percent of all bachelors' degrees.

"These institutions also account for nine of the top 10 colleges that graduate the most black students who go on to earn Ph.D.s, and four of the top five colleges that produce black medical-school acceptances," Gray writes. "Students select HBCUs for their educational excellence, low costs and nurturing environments."

A larger article in the CQ Researcher on Dec. 12, 2003 also repeated some popular misconceptions about HBCUs.

Responding to those mis-

perceptions, M. Christopher Brown II, the executive director of the UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute in Fairfax, Va., writes:

"The article suggested that enrollments at HBCUs are declining. Please note that student enrollment at HBCUs has increased regularly for several decades, and is in fact at an all time high. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 190,000 black students attending HBCUs in 1980; 208,600 in 1990; and 227,000 in 2000."

Instead of maligning black college, critics such as Ward Connerly should be praising them for accomplishing so much against tremendous odds. They should also recognize that more students are attending HBCUs by choice.

For example, one of my nephews, Iverson Gandy III, was accepted by Harvard University after he graduated from high school. But he chose to enroll at predominantly black Alabama A&M University - and he now says he is happy with his decision.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

Mixed messages from D.C. primary

RON WALTERS



Howard Dean edged Al Sharpton in the District of Columbia's non-binding primary by a margin of 43 percent to 34 percent.

All but ignored by the national media, the D.C. primary last week pitted front-runner, Dean head-to-head against the rest of the progressive candidates for the Democratic nomination for president, all hoping to win over voters who were mostly White liberals or African-Americans.

Moreover, Dean went head on with the two black candidates in the race, Al Sharpton and Carol Moseley Braun, who has since ended her campaign. The results: Dean 43 percent, Sharpton 34 percent, Moseley Braun 12 percent and Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich of Ohio, 8 percent.

So, how is it that Dean beat Al Sharpton, both of whom campaigned in the District, a city that is 60 percent black and 31 percent white?

An analysis of the voting shows that it was not a clear-cut victory for Dean. The Democratic front-runner beat Sharpton in the predominantly white areas -

Wards 1, 2, 3 and 6 - but Sharpton defeated Dean in all of the black wards - 4, 5, 7, and 8.

For example, in Ward 8, which is almost entirely black, Sharpton trounced Dean 59 percent to 24 percent. In the mostly white Ward 3, Dean beat Sharpton by a 10-to-1 margin.

For those blacks who voted for Dean, rather than Sharpton or Moseley Braun, they followed the lead of the Congressional Black Caucus and other black leaders in ignoring the black candidates and supporting one of the white candidates they believe can actually win. For most of them, it is not just about race, but about the "realism" that neither Sharpton or Moseley Braun could eventually win the election.

But there is the circular logic that says if they don't vote for them, then they surely will not win. So, besides the fact that so many blacks want to be with the winner, for others, their evaluation is not just that Dean can win, but that there is something undesirable about the black candidates in comparison to him.

Those who voted for either

Sharpton or Braun highlight the split in the black community over these two candidates; but that split is over now that Moseley Braun has pulled out of the race.

The District of Columbia primary shows what we might be seeing on the national scene: the black vote thus far has no unity, no leadership, no coherence. If this continues, it means that the black vote will not make a difference in the primary election because it will be so fractured.

Anyway you cut it, a victory in the District primary election is a boost for Dean; he can assert that he has strong African-American and white liberal support and can win in a place that both has a significant black population and a tilt toward the South. This means that he may be positioned, as he comes out of the elections in Iowa and New Hampshire, to make a strong showing in South Carolina, where John Edwards, a regional favorite has the current edge.

But Sharpton is also positioned well to begin to seriously contest for the nomination in South Carolina. However, since he did not have the strength to win the District primary outright over Dean, it may mean that he might not have the strength to win Super Tuesday over the seven other candidates, especially if the black vote is distrib-

uted among them.

Whether the major media likes it or not, this election result represents the first victory by any candidate in the 2004 presidential election season, and initiates the movement of the Howard Dean juggernaut down the field toward the goal post of the nomination.

The Dean victory in the District could add important momentum to his campaign. It should also continue to strike fear in the hearts of Gephardt, Lieberman, Kerry and Edwards that Dean beat Sharpton in a place like the District of Columbia that could make him competitive in the South as well.

So, his victory in the District should hasten the frantic efforts by the major Democrats and the media to "stop Dean" as the person who has the lead, but who they think can't win the presidency because he is too liberal. It should give every Democrat pause that the main argument against Dean is that he is too much of a Democrat to win. They should ask themselves: "What is winning for?"

RON WALTERS is director of the African American Leadership Institute in the Academy of Leadership and professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland-College Park. His latest book is "White Nationalism, Black Interests" (Wayne State University Press).