

## The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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# Support older adults, caregivers

By Gayla S. Woody.  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Since its inception 41 years ago, Older Americans Month held each May has been a time for the entire nation to recognize the older adults in their communities. This year's Older Americans Month theme, "Aging Well, Living Well," was selected to celebrate and recognize older Americans who are living longer, healthier, and more productive lives.

The fact that older Americans are enjoying increased health and longevity is without a doubt something to celebrate. But there is another side to this story. Many aging Americans need some assistance in order to enjoy the independence and well being that we all cherish. With the growing number of older Americans comes an increased need for local support services that allow older adults to stay in their homes and communities as they age.

The older population is now much different than it was during the first Older Americans Month in 1963. Then, only 17 million Americans were age 65. Today, one in six Americans, or 44 million people, is age 60 or older. This includes four million Americans 85 or older who are at risk of losing their independence without critical support services. In only seven years, an age wave will hit the country when the baby boom generation begins to turn 65. It is projected that by the year 2030, one in five Americans will be over age 65 and the 85 plus population will be triple what it is today.

Many older adults benefit from programs that allow them to live independently. Programs established under the Older Americans Act, enacted in 1965, have been the foundation of services for older adults and are at the core of our national system of home and community-based care. The OAA is based on the principle that older adults are entitled to spend their retirement years in good health living with independence and dignity. To put this ideal into action, the OAA created a network of nearly 900 Area Agencies on Aging and Native American aging programs in communities across the country.

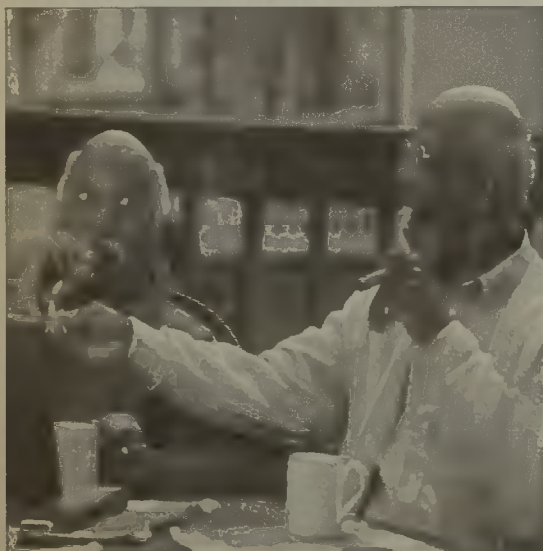
You may have seen a volunteer deliver a meal to an older neighbor's door or a van take an older person to a doctor's appointment, but have you ever wondered what makes these services available? In most cases, it starts with the OAA. With OAA funding and a variety of state and local resources, AAAs provide older adults with an incredibly wide range of services including, among others: health insurance counseling; senior centers and adult day care; home health and personal care services; energy, housing, and legal assistance; and elder abuse prevention and ombudsmen programs.

A recent study estimates that over 44 million Americans are serving in family caregiving roles and that number will increase rapidly as the population ages and medical science continues to extend life. AAAs and Native American aging programs also focus on the needs of these caregivers, whose loving and selfless acts help make it possible for their older family members to remain in their own homes and community. The National Family Caregiver Support Program, added to the OAA in 2000, provides new resources to help communities assist family members who are struggling to care for their loved ones.

As you can imagine, our growing aging population places an increased demand on local aging agencies, which too often lack sufficient resources to address everyone's needs. Many agencies report waiting lists for services like home-delivered meals that grow longer each day. There is an immediate need for increases in federal funding to assure the availability of OAA services.

In 2005, Congress is scheduled to consider legislation to determine future policy and funding levels for the OAA. It is vital that all members of Congress understand the importance of services under the OAA, and the need to increase our nation's investment in aging programs in order to meet not only current demands but also to respond to the needs generated by the pending aging boom.

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## Building bridges requires 'Courage'

As I See It  
GERALD O.  
JOHNSON



A circle of my friends spent time last weekend at the Museum of the New South touring the "Courage" exhibit. It was my second time visiting the exhibit, but it was the first visit for the rest of the group.

The all African American group consisted of nine women and six men ranging in age from mid-30s to mid-60s. Seven considered themselves transplanted northerners and eight were southerners.

The "Courage" exhibit chronicles events in Clarendon county South Carolina leading to the 1954 historic Brown versus Board of Education Supreme Court decision. This year is the fifty-year anniversary of the

Supreme Court decision.

Once the tour was completed, we gathered to discuss the impact it had on each of us. It was a fascinating discussion. Immediately the northerners were nauseated, outraged and depressed to see that such hatred existed in the not so distant past. For the southerners it was a brutal reminder of what growing up in the south was all about.

The experience brought tears to the eyes of the under-40 constituency. One young lady expressed now knowing why older African American strangers took so much pride in her success at being a bank manager in a predominantly white neighborhood. She now understood that they knew the sacrifices and the courage was not in vain.

Once the rage began to subside, the conversation turned to the examples of courage demonstrated by the people who had to live

through this experience.

The black minister who asked the school board for a bus so his kids would not have to walk 50 miles to school each day. When the school board denied his request, he determined to do something about it. It was the start of school desegregation.

The white Clarendon County judge who risked life and career declaring segregated schools unconstitutional. There were many, many more who sacrificed considerably to get a fair share of this country we call the United States of America.

As a consequence of "Courage," I found recent comments by School Board member Larry Gavreau to the Tuesday Morning Breakfast club eye-opening. Mr. Gavreau stated according to Educate! ["It's too far." He declined to address the 1954 Brown vs. Board ruling ordering desegregation "Brown was too far."

Today, he said, schools are not practicing segregation. And the claim of haves and have nots "doesn't add up."

Mr. Gavreau like many moving into a fast growing area like Charlotte, fail to understand how the history of an area helps explain the current political, social, and economical environment a area finds itself in. As a result, factions are formed and processes become divisive instead of progressive.

It would be wise if all of us visit the "Courage" exhibit at the Museum of the New South. If nothing more, it gives a baseline for dialogue. Even if people fail to totally agree, it would allow for a better understanding of positions being taken by the various factions.

As I see it, once we stop talking at each other and start talking to each other, we will begin to build bridges that will make a difference.

GERALD O. JOHNSON is publisher of The Post.

## A labor of betrayal to civil rights

GEORGE E.  
CURRY



A conference last week at Columbia University was one of the most important ones I've ever attended. It was organized to develop strategies to counter the Right-wing's slick and well-financed campaign to distort the truth about affirmative action and other social issues.

Scheduled to speak was a Who's Who of the Civil Rights Movement and academia: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Chair Mary Frances Berry; Ted Shaw, the new head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; Derrick Bell, author and professor of law at New York University; Columbia University President Lee Bollinger; Claude Steele, chair of the psychology department at Stanford University and Tim Wise, director of the Association for White Anti-Racist Education, among others.

Workshops were organized to develop a better communications strategy, to improve research, to find ways to defend affirmative action at the state level and to help universities maintain diver-

sity programs.

The conference was organized by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a coalition of approximately 180 civil and human rights groups; Americans for a Fair Chance, a pro-affirmative action group and the African-American Policy Forum, headed by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, a law professor at Columbia University, and Luke Charles Harris, a professor of political science at Vassar College.

On Thursday, the day before the conference was to begin, a group of teaching and research assistants interested in forming a union at Columbia University, informed conference organizers that if they went forward with the two-day session, they would picket the conference site. The group, Graduate Student Employees United, is affiliated with Local 2110 of the United Auto Workers. Although best known for organizing auto workers, the UAW also represents white collar technical and professional workers, state employees, teachers and daycare workers.

For the next 24 hours, Wade Henderson, Kim Crenshaw and Luke Charles Harris were frantically trying to negotiate a settlement with UAW local leaders. They pointed out that UAW had known about the conference for six months and had raised no objections. More

important, there were numerous activities being held on campus that were not being picketed. Several proposals were made to accommodate the teaching assistants movement, including allowing them to state their grievances as part of the conference. However, those overtures were rejected. When appeals were made to national UAW leaders, they refused to reverse the decision.

Presented with the choice of crossing a picket line or attending the conference, Wade Henderson's LCRR and Americans for a Fair Chance pulled out of the conference, as did several other participants. When Crenshaw and I spoke on Thursday, she asked whether I was still willing to serve as a panelist and my reply was, "I don't care if they put up a picket line around the podium, I'll be there."

It's not that I am anti-labor. Rather, I am pro-anything that benefits my people. In this instance, I wasn't the one who crossed the line. It was organized labor - and some of our leaders who caved in to their outrageous demand - that crossed the line. They crossed the line by showing that when the interests of people of color are pitted against the interests of largely White graduate assistants who earn the equivalent of \$40,000 in stipends and tuition benefits, organized labor will

betray us.

This is also a test for civil rights leaders. I understand the need for compromise, especially if you're part of a coalition in which a member has grievances. But when it comes to doing something as important as trying to counter the Far Right, nothing should take precedence over our agenda. The dirty little secret is that organized labor provides substantial funding for civil rights organizations and in exchange for money, they exercise veto power over any major decision made by civil rights leaders. Labor exercised that clout at Columbia and people of color were the losers.

To their credit, professors Crenshaw and Harris did not cancel the conference. And many respected figures in our community, including Ted Shaw and Derrick Bell, did not buckle under pressure.

More than anything else, the Columbia fiasco underscores the need for people of color to finance our own movements and not be overly reliant on allies who will betray us when it suits their needs.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. His most recent book is "The Best of Emerge Magazine," an anthology published by Ballantine Books. He can be reached through his Web site, georgecurry.com.