

# The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

1531 Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203

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OPINION

## Good news for working families

Federal earned income tax credit will relieve low-income

As tax season approaches, the Children's Defense Fund is helping to spread some important good news about tax credits and free tax preparation help for working families. Many of the country's working poor may not know they are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, a refundable tax credit for people who work full- or part-time but earn low wages. These are the hard working low- to moderate-income families who are playing by the rules but still struggling to stay ahead.

This federal credit can generate a cash refund for them of as much as \$4,400, and it can be even more in states that offer a supplemental state Earned Income Tax Credit. In addition, the Child Tax Credit can be worth up to \$1,000 per child for some working families. More than 21 million workers collected billions of dollars in EITC refunds in 2003, and those families were able to use that money to help cover key expenses like rent, utilities, food, medical bills, child care, and even to put a down payment on a home. The EITC is the most effective work support and anti-poverty tool we have today. But even though most low-income working families with children qualify for both the EITC and the Child Tax Credit, up to 20 percent of eligible workers do not receive them.

Some unscrupulous commercial tax preparers take advantage of workers who are likely to be eligible for these credits by targeting them for "rapid refunds" through Refund Anticipation Loans. These are short-term, high-interest loans that tax filers take out against their expected tax return.

Tax preparers aggressively market these loans as a way to get cash fast instead of waiting for a tax refund, and most of their customers are low-income taxpayers who need their refunds quickly to pay for basic needs. During 2003, about 7 million low-income workers purchased RALs. But these loans undermine benefits like the EITC by costing low-income workers large portions of their tax refunds in interest and fees. Across the country, low- to moderate-income working families who claimed the EITC lost more than \$900 million of their earned refunds during the 2004 tax season in exchange for collecting those refunds about 10 days sooner, in some cases. There are ways for families to learn about the benefits for which they are eligible and receive free, fast, tax help at the same time.

Throughout tax season, the Children's Defense Fund and others across the country are operating free tax filing sites. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program was created by the IRS and is supported and overseen by the agency VITA sites offer free tax preparation help to families making \$38,000 or less per year. Volunteers are trained to help families claim the EITC and other valuable federal, state, and local tax credits to which they are entitled and collect their refunds quickly without the unnecessary high fees of commercial preparers.

Even those who aren't required to file a tax return based on earnings should file a return because they may have had too much taken out of their paychecks during the year or they might qualify for a refund through the EITC. Volunteers are also able to help working families who failed to file their taxes or claim the EITC tax credits in the past claim them now, because they have up to three years to do so.

VITA sites are set up in convenient locations such as shopping centers, libraries, community centers, and schools. Families visiting them are also able to receive information about other government benefits, including food and nutrition programs, health care, housing, child care, and energy assistance.

All of CDF's state offices in New York, Texas, Minnesota, Ohio, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and California, and the District of Columbia participate in the VITA program. Child poverty would be reduced by 20 percent and the number of families living in extreme poverty would be reduced by 70 percent if all families with children participated in the government programs for which they are qualified, including the EITC. The CDF is part of the movement to help make free tax assistance available, accessible, and well-publicized for everyone who could use it.

Could the VITA program help your family? To locate the site nearest to you, call 1-800-829-1040. If you have Internet access, you can also learn more by visiting the Tax and Benefits section of CDF's Web site ([www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)).

Bennettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.



WELCOME  
CIAA  
FANG!

## My time with journalism's Be-Be kids

Last Saturday, I celebrated a homecoming. I was invited to address the opening session of an 8-week Urban Journalism Workshop, sponsored by the Washington Association of Black Journalists. Two decades ago, I served as founding director of the workshop.

Next year will mark the 30th anniversary of the St. Louis Minority Journalism Workshop, a program that I helped create and served as founding director before moving to Washington. With the assistance of the New York Association of Black Journalists, I served as founding director of a similar workshop there after I left Washington. In all, about 15 workshops around the country are patterned after the St. Louis model.

Over the years, hundreds of high school students who sat through Saturday sessions have become professional journalists. I call them my journalism Be-Be kids — they don't die, they multiply. They include: Ann Scales, an editor at the Boston Globe; Marcia Davis, an editor at the Washington Post; Everett Mitchell, editor of the Nashville Tennessean; Mark Russell, managing editor of the Orlando Sentinel; Ben Holden, executive editor of

the Columbus, Ga. Ledger-Enquirer; Celeste Garrett of the Chicago Tribune; Andre Jackson, assistant managing editor for business at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; Bennie Currie, formerly of the Associated Press; Russ Mitchell, an anchor/reporter for CBS News; Warren Woodberry, a reporter for the New York Daily News; Jennifer Golson, a reporter for the Newark Star-Ledger and the list goes on. Three of my former students — Alvin Reed, Marcia Davis and Betsy Peoples — worked on my staff when I was editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine.

In addition to directing three high school workshops, I taught in summer programs at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and a Washington-based program sponsored by Northwestern University. Out of the Northwestern summer program, designed to reach students at historically black colleges, came Jacque Reed, an anchor for BET News, David Cummings, a reporter for ESPN magazine and Emile Wilbekin, who served as editor-in-chief of Vibe magazine.

By no means did I do any of this alone. In each city, the workshops were sponsored and staffed by the local affiliate of the National Association of Black Journalists. After I moved to New York, the Washington workshop was directed by Ken Cooper, a Washington Post

national correspondent and former member of my St. Louis staff; Sonja Ross and Darlene Superville of the Associated Press; Robin Bennfield of the Discovery Channel. Keith Alexander, who participated in the Pittsburgh program started by Christopher Moore, another former St. Louis staffer, taught in the Washington program while serving as president of the Washington Association of Black Journalists.

Obviously, the instructors were as enthusiastic about the workshops as the students. In addition to Chris Moore in Pittsburgh, Rochelle Riley, who served on the Washington workshop staff, started programs in Dallas and Louisville before moving to Detroit. Cheryl Smith took over in Dallas after Rochelle left for Louisville, where she started another program before moving to Detroit.

Some of our former students not only became professional journalists, but started similar workshops — Bennie Currie and Celeste Garrett in Memphis and Mark Russell in Cleveland.

When I looked into the bright eyes of about 50 aspiring journalists on Saturday, I told them about some of the students that had gone before them. Around the time I was speaking to them, Mark Russell was preparing to leave Orlando and travel to

New York, where he would be serving a juror for the Pulitzer Prizes.

A profile on Mark in 2003 for the McCormick Fellowship Initiative at Northwestern University mentioned our relationship. It noted, "After watching Curry in action as a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch during the 1970s, he decided that 'this is the guy I want to be like.' Russell, then 17, abandoned his original plan to be a football player or a banker making lots of money."

On Monday, I received an e-mail from Juan Diasgranados, one of the students in the audience on Saturday.

"I just wanted to say that I have many future hopes in being a TV anchor or a radio personality one day, and the words of wisdom you told us really motivated me. I have been let down by some people saying I am not good enough, but I really think I can. I just want to thank you and wish you the best of luck in your career. I hope one day I could be like you."

That's what Mark Russell said. It wasn't so much about me as it was about my profession. Like Mark, I am sure Juan will realize his dream.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service. He appears on National Public Radio three times a week as part of "News and Notes with Ed Gordon."

## GOP's Contract with Black America

When the Republican Party took aim at controlling the United States Congress, some people may have thought their aspiration was a pipe dream at best for it was almost a given for decades that Democrats controlled the U.S. Congress.

However, Republican strategists put together a "Contract with America" that piqued the national psyche enough that today they

control the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and The White House. Republican Party's winning strategy was to blur the line between church and state; thereby, unleashing the awesome voting power of the religious vote.

Today the legitimacy of faith-based organizations participating in some governmental activities is gaining some receptivity in the economic mainstream. Faith Based voting blocks are reshaping the political arenas in favor of the Republican Party. However, the Republican Party recognizes that there is a significant browning of American under-way from blacks, Hispanics, and Asians who will combine

to become tomorrow's new political majority. This coming nonwhite majority means that today's Republican strategists must not be caught in the quandary of their party being labeled an ultraconservative whites-only organization.

The Republican Party knows that the Achilles heel of nonwhites in politics has been the de facto glass ceiling where their wins are limited to district races. Some political pundits might argue that many black politicians over the last 40 years were in office as a reward for participation in the civil rights movement. This civil rights activist background may bode well in local or district elections that have overwhelming minority voters, but it may be an albatross in statewide elections where some white voters may feel some aversion to voting for yesterday's civil rights activists.

The black "Talented Tenth" were persona non grata in the black community for they benefited from Affirmative action. Affirmative action did not reach the masses of black America. These upwardly mobile blacks evolved into white American clones, which exacerbated the view of them as being sellouts in black America.

But in roughly 50 years of civil rights evolution, such as

the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education (knocking down the infamous "separate by equal ruling that legitimated Jim Crow), enactments of the civil rights and voting rights laws, and the U.S. Supreme Court knocking down the anti-miscegenation laws, there is a paradigm shift evolving in black America that the Republican strategists appear to be cultivating.

Young blacks' participation in interracial relationships suggests that they do not harbor disdain for whites because they have no appreciation for the maltreatment their fore-parents experienced in the racial segregation epoch. They may not feel beholden to yesterday's black civil rights leadership. This point was made at a University of Delaware black graduate student activity where I chatted with a black young lady who labeled many black leaders as relics of a by-gone era.

The UD graduate student's assessment gains credence when you recognize that roughly 80 percent of the U.S. population in the 2000 Census was under 55 years of age. This suggests that many young people are relying heavily on learning of the trials and tribulations of the black American civil rights movement from books and

films. As yesterday's national civil rights leadership continues to fade away, one might expect the emotional links to the civil rights era to fade with time. Hence, it appears that the "Talented Tenth" may be coming back into vogue as interracial integration gains receptivity in black America and mainstream America.

In 1996, I chatted with the late Emily Morris, an African American who had been an elected official in Kent County, Delaware where one might have expected the anti-black receptivity to be on par with anti-black Mississippi in the late 1950s. I wanted to understand how she was able to get white farmers to vote for her. She said she presented her ideas from a mainstream point of view. This same county produced Delaware's first black mayor in the City of Smyrna who was also embraced by white voters.

Today Republican strategists recognize that white America will vote for a black candidate if that person can be packaged as a mainstream individual. They also know that the black church is the strongest institution in the black community and if they are to garner their fair share of the black vote their black voter outreach efforts need to be tied to this church.

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