

The Charlotte Post

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EDITORIALS

Focus on our issues, not words

Angeles Ortega-Moore's recent comments to the Washington Post about Charlotte's handling of immigration sparked bit of a furor over political correctness, ethnic sensibility and common sense.

Mrs. Ortega-Moore, executive director of the Latin American Coalition, told the daily publication that whites intimidated to her that they preferred Latinos over African Americans. She was quoted as saying Charlotte's immigration situation is "tense, very tense." It used to be everybody here loved the Latinos. They would say "We like you more than the blacks." Now we're like the Big Bad Wolf."

By "they," we're guessing Mrs. Ortega-Moore wasn't talking about black people, which suggests African Americans think enough of themselves not to stoop to that level of self-hatred.

Some folks took offense, especially those who've worked across ethnic, racial and cultural lines to provide opportunities for all people here. When all is said and done, however, those words are nothing more than a temporary tempest in a teapot.

It's wrong-headed and overly simplistic to brand Mrs. Ortega-Moore as the villain, so we're willing to accept her explanation that her words weren't meant to offend. If she was repeating what had been told to her, fine; although she could've qualified her remarks with what she actually believes. However, it brings up a conundrum black folks face consistently: acceptance from others vs. group isolationism. As humans, we all yearn to be accepted, but that shouldn't be pursued at the expense of selling ourselves short, or worse, selling out. Historically, we've formed our own organizations when the larger society refused to recognize our potential and contributions, or just didn't want us that close by. That's why there are black colleges, churches, fraternities and sororities and newspapers.

As African Americans, our problem is less what any ethnic, social, or government entity thinks of us as a collective than what we need to do to improve our lot as a people. From poor parenting skills, inadequate health care and crime to a prevalent me-first attitude, black Americans have more than enough challenges to keep us busy. We've battled prejudice and lowered expectations since the first African set foot on these shores more than 400 years ago, so we're no stranger to the verbal slings and arrows of ignorance, whether real or imagined.

The key today, as it has been from the start, is what we'll do to continue our progress, which in the long run, will benefit society as a whole.

We suspect Mrs. Ortega-Moore would want no less.

N.C. House speaker's trials have consequences at home

N.C. House Speaker Jim Black has to be more nervous than a possum crossing Independence Boulevard these days. And for good reason.

Three people connected to him have been spending time in court lately facing charges stemming from their lobbying to bring a lottery to the state, mail fraud or other alleged misdeeds. Kevin Geddings, a former Charlotte public relations professional and lottery commissioner was found guilty of mail fraud last week, the latest blow to the speaker's reputation.

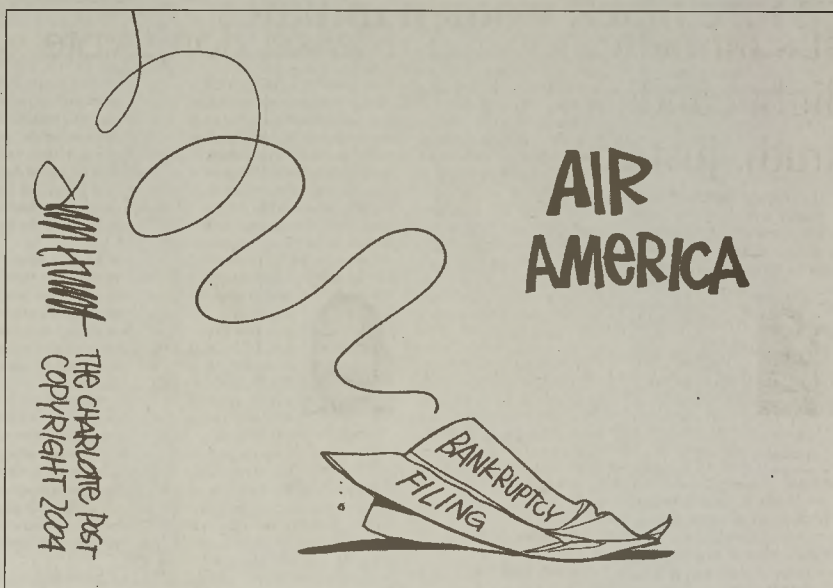
Although the speaker has yet to be indicted for any crime, prosecutors are drawing a net around Mr. Black's associates in a way that certainly clouds his political future.

The fallout will be felt throughout North Carolina, including the run-up to next month's elections. Mr. Black's House District 100, which includes south Charlotte and Matthews, is predominantly Democratic, and his chances at re-election should be good provided another legal bombshell doesn't drop on his campaign. But his re-election and ultimately hanging on to the speaker's job has far-reaching repercussions for all Mecklenburg.

If he's replaced after eight years in the top position, millions of dollars in state funding that has flowed this way to pay for programs ranging from extra district attorneys to marketing the CIAA basketball tournament will be jeopardized. For a region that receives precious little relative to its tax contributions to North Carolina, slowing that reciprocation from Raleigh puts Mecklenburg in a precarious spot.

On the legislative side, replacing Mr. Black would have consequences for African Americans. Depending on who took the gavel, the drawing of legislative districts could dilute the voting strength of African Americans and make us less a player in competitive districts. If a Republican or more conservative Democrat takes over, black legislators, who hold key committee assignments now, would also lose their standing in the House hierarchy. That makes it more difficult for their voices to be heard during the introduction and debate over bills.

No one denies Speaker Black is one of the state's most astute politicians. He's smart, fearless and not afraid to take a chance on people who traditionally have been left out of the legislative loop. We don't know what the legal process will hold, although if charges are brought against him, Mr. Black will no doubt marshal a vigorous defense. If it does come to that, however, he's not the only one who stands to lose.



Internal, external strife plagues Haiti

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — The first sentence of the U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Sheet quickly sums up a widely-held perception of Haiti. It begins, "Haiti is one of the least developed and least stable countries in the Western Hemisphere."

Even though Haiti is awash in poverty, that terse description does not begin to explain the role of Spain, France and the United States in destabilizing the small country to the South of us or its valiant struggle to gain independence. And we certainly can't expect to read about it in our textbooks. So I offer you an abbreviated version, with the hope that you'll be inspired to do additional reading on your own.

Before his non-discovery of America, Christopher Columbus stopped in 1492 on the island of Hispaniola. Like America, it was already populated by indigenous people. In the early 17th century, the French established a presence on the island. In 1697, the countries struck a deal whereby France would control the western third of the island, now known as Haiti, and Spain would retain the eastern section, now the Dominican Republic.

With its thick forests and sugar industry, Haiti became one of France's wealthiest colonies. But that wealth came at a high price, necessitating the importation of 500,000 African slaves. There were scattered and uncoordinated slave revolts. One of the best known early rebellions was led by Francois Macandal. His rebellion from 1751-1757 was said to have left 6,000 dead. Macandal used voodoo and African traditions to motivate his followers. When the French burned him at the stake in what is now Cap-Haitien, it was reported that the stake snapped, which only added to his mystique and reputation.

But the mother of all slave revolutions was led by Toussaint Louverture. Under his leadership, a half-million slaves defeated French colonists. But instead of being able to celebrate the victory, Napoleon pretended to be interested in signing a peace accord with Louverture and in 1802 tricked him into surrendering. But Louverture was betrayed and died in a French prison.

But the yearning to be free was not limited to one person, as the French would soon learn.

Louverture's capture only inspired Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe, leaders of different military factions, to continue the struggle. Dessalines's troops defeated the French Nov. 18, 1803 at the Battle of Vertieres. On

Jan. 1, 1803, Haiti declared its independence, the second independent country in the New World, behind the 13 colonies.

Dessalines became Haiti's first ruler. In a move that would cripple the new nation's economy, France refused to recognize Haiti until it paid the former colonial ruler reparations in 1833 to compensate for the losses of French planters.

For different reasons, the U.S. also sought to isolate Haiti. Correspondence during that era shows that presidents and other government officials feared that the Haitian Revolution might inspire other slave uprisings, threatening its source of free labor.

Like other nations — including Spain and France — the U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934. U.S. officials, wary of growing German influence, were said to be upset by a mob lynching of President Guillaume Sam. The exit of the U.S. after 19 years was followed by a series of coups and the corrupt leadership of Francois Duvalier (Papa Doc) and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc). Papa Doc was known for the Tonton Macoutes, his secret police that squashed dissent and inflicted violence on his political opponents. The dictator declared himself president for life. Upon his death in 1971, he was succeeded by his 19-year-old son. The younger president for life was

deposed in 1986, forcing him to flee the country.

Things seemed to take a turn for the better in 1991 when Jean-Bertrand Aristide became the first democratically elected president. True to Haiti's political upheaval, he, too, was soon deposed in a coup. A military junta controlled by Raul Cedras ruled the country until the U.S. invaded the country, returning Aristide to power and dissolving the military. After his term, Aristide was succeeded in 1996 by Rene Preval, his prime minister. After his term, Aristide was elected again in 2001, an election marred by charges that Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party improperly counted votes. In 2004, Aristide was the victim of what Ron Daniels calls an "orchestrated ouster." Orchestrated, of course, by the United States. And once again, Rene Preval became the reluctant president.

Daniels, founder of the New York-based Haiti Support Project, observed that Haiti is deeply divided along class and color lines. And its problems will not be solved until there is fundamental justice for all levels of Haitian society.

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Amish think outside the revenge box

Imagine if someone crashes in your neighborhood, takes your children hostage, and kills five of these children. Does this horrific scene conjure up disdainfulness or even revengefulness? If you don't retaliate, are you sending a symbolic message that you are a wimp?

As the daily body counts from murders escalate in many cities and localities, we quiver at the evening news murder reports. We might even feel that street gang revengefulness underpins many of these murders in retaliation for some of their fallen gang cohorts. Therefore, today the civil rights struggle has morphed into everyday inner city people holding public demonstrations trying to take back their neighborhoods from their drug overlords. I felt sympathy for the people living in thug-infested neighborhoods as I watched a television news anchor, on a Philadelphia station, struggle to share that the city had

reached over 300 killings in 2006. I find myself pondering, "Is forgiveness or compassion for my fellowman or woman now out of vogue in inner city America? Is revengefulness the new paradigm because street gangs cannot afford to appear weak? Think about it, the appearance of weakness might open up gangster-purported turf to rival gangs, so murder is now the weapon of choice to enforce inner city border patrol.

When murderous carnage finally found its way into the lives of the Amish people in Nickel Mines, Pa., these gentle people showed there is another way to respond to the loss of loved ones without exploiting revengefulness. But it is good to hear how other non-Amish people felt about the murderer. Three middle-aged ladies working in Pennsylvania felt very strongly that the murderer should burn in hell. These ladies were very upset with the murders and didn't mind sharing their judgment on the eternal fate of the murderer even though some of their religious faiths may teach against their prejudging individuals. Obviously

these ladies' stance ran counterpoised to the action taken by the Amish who forgave the murderer, went to his funeral, and are sharing some of the money given to the families of the victims to the help of the family of the murderer.

I chatted with a young lady who struggled with not seeing some sort of retaliation by the Amish on the family of the killer. A fellow in his mid-sixties was initially mum when asked to comment on the Amish murders, and then he shared that the Amish decision to let the murderer's family where the murders occurred be razed would help to erase all vestiges of the horrific crimes. This senior citizen felt that a monument would have continued indefinitely to recall the hurt of the awful day.

A Christian conservative chap offered a holistic look at the Amish actions that was underpinned by biblical scripture. I told this Christian minister-without-portfolio that I had misgivings after putting money into a special collection in church for the Amish when I learned that they were going to share it with the family of the murderer. This minister-without-

portfolio argued that when we gave our money to the Amish we offered them the right to use it according to their beliefs and customs. Therefore, there was no need for me to have reservations with their using portions of the money to help the murderer's family.

This minister-without-portfolio argued that the killer's family also needed help for they had lost a breadwinner and father figure. He shared his vision of the long-term fallout of this horrific crime by saying that the murderer's family would have to carry this awful shame for the remainder of their days.

As I ponder the Amish actions in light of the comments of the minister-without-portfolio, I no longer feel reservations over giving money to the Amish cause. It was also clear that the Amish had turned this tragedy into a lesson on forgiveness for the nation because they are showing us that the cycle of violence now commonplace in many inner cities has the potential to be stopped if we start to think outside of the revengefulness box.

SHERMAN MILLER is a syndicated columnist.