

It's far better to light candles for truth, justice

"I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."
Fannie Lou Hamer

The past few weeks have been fraught with frustrations and angst for those of us viewed as leaders or spokespersons for African American people. Oh yes, it has been an extremely daunting task to reside in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and dread having to remove the plastic bag from the daily morning paper.

And while not having conducted a survey, I am confident that I am not the only one harboring these emotions. I want to believe, indeed *must* believe that others feel the same way I do when they scan the front page above the fold and find a face peering back of a black male/man that has been arrested for allegedly committing some heinous offense.

Dr. Martin L. King Jr. reminded us all, in essence, that the character of a man is not determined during times of comfort and convenience but where he stands during times of challenge and controversy. History is replete with the successes of black people making a way out of no way. Weathering storms and overcoming obstacles. Words from the Negro National Anthem "Life Every Voice and Sing" are a rallying cry reminding the world that "We have come, over a way that with tears had been watered. We have come, threading our path through the blood of the slaughtered."

I am hard-pressed to accept as fact that James Weldon Johnson, author of what many now call the Black National Anthem, could ever believe his reference to "tears and blood" would cease to imply the hard earned victories fought in the arena of Civil and Human Rights but would shamelessly come to personify a Travis Davis and Ms. Sherry Hampton who both died at the hands of what appears to have been black male assailants. There are indeed innumerable challenges and controversies in black communities and what may on the surface appear to be signs of defeat; but there also exists developmental opportunities.

My fourth trip to Ghana, West Africa in late July resulted in my having successfully facilitated an internationally attended conference on reparations, repatriation, reconciliation and transformation. The sojourn to the "Mother Land" also served to strengthen my resolve to redouble my efforts to do everything I can to leave my community more beautiful and beneficial than when I inherited it. I also found solace in knowing I am not alone in this work of addressing the myriad issues confronting blacks in general but black males in particular.

In mid October I had the great fortune to attend the MetroLina Chapter Association of Black Social Workers fourth annual Training Institute. The theme for this year's conference, "He Ain't Heavy; He's My Brother: A Response to an American Crisis," hinted at an array of workshop topics ranging from "Empowering Single Mothers to Raise Sons to be GreAAAt Men!" and "Black Boys: Wonderful, Thriving, and in Need of Permanence," to "Reaching Defiant Black Males." It was a very meaningful day and I would venture to say the conference served to identify existing programs in Charlotte that are making a difference in the lives of black males.

During that same week, I sat with others at a most enlightening event entitled "Souls of White Folks" sponsored by Mecklenburg Ministries. Three white reverends gathered to discuss their individual experiences resulting from having read and discussed literature related to white privilege, one of the last remnants of racism/white supremacy. Suffice it to say I left the Food for Thought Luncheon with hope and a heartfelt belief that there were now three additional whites who will hopefully ask what they can do to begin exploring ways of repairing the damage and addressing the injustices stemming from the many manifestations of white privilege. Three more whites on the path to becoming allies for change.

I agree with Dante, that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, during a period of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality. Charlotte, like America, is undergoing a moral crisis. Many of whom I have met over the past few weeks have confirmed my belief that rather than continue to curse the dark, it is far more prudent to light a candle.

Community activist AHMAD DANIELS lives in Charlotte

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Please, don't vote

On November 7, will you fall for the politricksters' games again? Will you, once again, be tricked by the notion that all you have to do is vote and things will be all right for you and your people? Will you continue to be the fodder from which "politicians for life," political crooks and thieves, and political charlatans gain their wealth while ignoring you? Will you allow yourself to be played by the same old, worn-out refrain of, "Vote for me, and I'll set you free"? Will you be a "sucker" for the umpteenth time in this biennial, obligatory, political, mating dance? Will you buy-in to the tired, played-out, electoral bait-and-switch charade?

I truly hope and pray you won't. And the best way to assure the politricksters will not trick you again is by not voting for them. So don't vote on November 7 and show these "smiling faces that tell lies" you will not take their shenanigans any longer. Show these disingenuous, pandering, condescending baby-kissers that you are an intelligent, informed, and rational person who has decided not to vote for them.

Don't get hung-up on the fact that you are a "life-long" Democrat or a Republican. Don't be led by a false sense of loyalty to any party. Don't feel guilty for not voting for party favorites. After all, who made them the favorites anyway? It certainly wasn't you. We only vote on choices that have already been made; we vote for folks who have already been selected by others. Take Bush, for instance, (to borrow a line from Henny Youngman, "Please take him"). He was selected as the party favorite and you had to vote for him or one of the other guys.

In local races we are "allowed" to vote for politicians who are selected by party bosses. Why are they selected? It could be to return a favor; it could be patronage; it could be cronyism, it could be nepotism; it could be collusion; it could be corruption. Whatever the reason is, we get to vote on somebody else's choice rather than someone who will do our bidding, someone who will finally get something done for black people.

By and large, black people play the political game just to play, not to win. We just love to feel like we have some political juice. But we always lose in this cut-throat game of chance. If we played to win, by leveraging our so-called voting power, a voting bloc that everyone says can determine the outcome of an election, we might have some juice. Our children's future might be considered in those secret caucuses held by politricksters. We don't count because all we do is vote. So, this time, don't vote.

To show how politically weak we are, in the 2000 presidential election, one black man had more power than all of the Black people who voted. That black man was Clarence Thomas. Although his wife was said to be collecting applications from perspective Bush employees, Thomas failed to recuse himself, as did his god, Anton Scalia, who supposedly had two sons working as lawyers for Bush. The final 5 to 4 "selection" by the Supremes meant that Clarence Thomas had the power to determine who the next president would be; he picked George Bush. Who did the vast majority of black voters pick? Remember, "It's not the people who cast the votes that count; it's the people who count the votes that are cast."

Because the political game is obviously too sophisticated for the black electorate, because we just can't seem to understand that politics is about self-interest, and because we don't seem to get it when it comes to our allegiance to the Dems or the Repubs, let's not vote. We are ensconced in the Democratic Party, just like we were loyal to the Republican Party 75 years ago; what have they delivered to us?

Now that you have a long list of what not to vote for, your checklist of what to vote for should be short enough to make your voting decisions much easier. Of course you have to do some work, be informed, do some research, and watch the count on election night (they cheat, you know). But if you are not willing to think independently and put in a little work before and after you exercise your precious franchise, "Please, don't vote."

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, a professor at the University of Cincinnati, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald newspaper and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce.

THE IN BOX

Activist's words not offensive

Re: "Crossing border of ethnic sensitivity (Oct.5)." No surprise here and I'm not offended at all.

The greatest chasm of racial understanding will always exist between whites and blacks. My concern is that black folk continue to seek favor with others. I don't care if whites favor any race. We should focus our anger and passion to our own causes and issues and stop wasting time trying to appease whites. We need realistic, savvy representation in influential sectors of our society, not race-card players.

We need activists who can "play the game." That means building bridges, capital and political clout which does not necessarily equate to 'selling out'. However, we can only achieve success if we act and think as a group, not individuals. Furthermore, black individuals and institutions with influence should assume a greater role in improving our communities. It's 2006, not 1906. We can do better.

John Howard
via e-mail

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Should N.C. claim Andrew Jackson?

North Carolina claims Andrew Jackson as one of the three presidents it contributed to the nation, along with James K. Polk and Andrew Johnson, all of who later moved to Tennessee.

Polk and Johnson were certainly born in North Carolina. Jackson, however, was born near the North and South Carolina boundary, with both states claiming him as their native son.

H.W. Brands, the author of the recent bestseller, Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times, takes South Carolina's side on the birthplace question. However, he points out that Jackson spent much of his growing-up years in North Carolina, trained as a lawyer in Salisbury, and even practiced law here before crossing the mountains to what is now Tennessee. Even there, his first public service was as a North Carolina official since what became Tennessee was still a part of our state.

If North Carolina has a claim to Jackson, do we really want to brag about it? After all, Jackson has his detractors, who point to several troubling areas of his record. He was the owner of a large number of slaves. He was the leading proponent of the country's Indian removal policy, which led to the Trail of Tears leading from the mountains of the Carolinas and Georgia to Oklahoma. Finally, he enthusiastically pushed an expansionist policy towards lands controlled by Indians and Mexico.

Negative feelings about Jackson run high in some people. Jackson's biographer, H.W. Brands, says that some people ask him, "How can you defend that genocidal maniac?"

Brands does not argue with these criticisms of Jackson. But he does point out that Jackson lived in a different time. In his times in Tennessee and other parts of the South, slavery was the established economic and social order. Jackson was no different in this respect than the southern presidents who preceded him. Similarly, many Americans joined him in supporting the relocation of the eastern Indian tribes and the expansion of the country westward into territories controlled by other nations and Indian tribes. Brands points out, too, that Jackson "knew" the eastern Native Americans would be in danger from attack by the white settlers if they were not removed to the West.

To show how popular Jackson was during his times, Brands counted the number of places in America named after each of the early presidents. Washington and Jefferson are presidential names that are attached to many localities. But Jackson has more places named after him than any other president, indicating the great affection his contemporaries had for him.

There were good reasons to remember Jackson with gratitude, according to Brands.

The "Jacksonian Era" was responsible for bringing the common man into the American democratic experiment. Until Jackson's election as president, the United States was only "half way" to a democracy based on the will of the masses as opposed to one based on the will of a limited group of the wealthy and the educated.

He saved the union, twice. First, in 1815 during the War of 1812, General Andrew Jackson's victory over the British at New Orleans kept the British from grabbing control of the Mississippi River and jamming the United States back against the Eastern Seaboard. To those who say the battle was a waste since the peace treaty had already been signed, Brands says neither country had ratified the treaty. If the British had won the Battle of New Orleans, Britain might never have ratified the treaty and could have retained control of the Mississippi.

Secondly, when in 1832 South Carolina passed an ordinance of nullification and threatened secession, Jackson's firm action and threat to use armed forces to enforce the law and put down rebellion "saved the union" and established the precedent used by President Lincoln 30 years later to call for troops to put down South Carolina's second experiment with secession.

People can argue about where Andrew Jackson was born and whether or not he should be honored for his performance as a national leader. But one thing is certain: Brand's account of the orphan boy from the Carolina frontier country who becomes a national hero is a compelling story.

D.G. MARTIN is the host of UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Fridays at 9:30 p.m. and Sundays at 5 p.m.

