

OPINION

Depth of Blue's politics not evident to students

by Sherry Parfait

Politics and Blue. What do they have in common? Both come in many shades and hues. That is obvious in the case of Dan Blue, speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives. He is a politician, through and through, in dealing with the issues and the public.

Thirteen students from the Rainbow Institute summer program in journalism visited Blue recently at the North Carolina Legislative Building in Raleigh. He gave them an articulate talk about the current state legislative session, during which the bill giving the governor veto power was defeated, with the Speaker's help.

Blue, who is one of two black House speakers in the country, said that he took a strong stand against the legislation because too many powerful people have easy access to the governor, including newspaper editors and CEOs of major businesses. Ordinary people don't, so they have to work through their state legislators.

He argued that it is much easier for influential people to contact the governor than it would be for common folk to reach all of the state's 170

legislators.

The gubernatorial veto would make it possible for the rich and powerful to have one-stop shopping, at the governor's office.

But there's another way to look at this.

It is not surprising that a high-ranking official like the Speaker would oppose giving the governor veto power. It only makes sense for Blue to want to keep as much of the power for himself as possible. Why would anyone want to give governmental power to someone else, if they could keep it in their own hands?

North Carolina is the only state in the country that does not grant its governor the authority to veto bills that are passed by the legislature.

Whatever happened to the system of checks and balances in the Tarheel state?

Obviously the voters are impressed with Blue, since they have returned him to office repeatedly, and his colleagues have elected him as their leader. But the Rainbow Institute delegation was not as impressed.

Some felt that he didn't take the student journalists and their questions seriously. He seemed deter-

mined to avoid the main issues and did not fully explain his position on some of the issues he did talk about.

The students expected to learn his views about his job and his positions on legislative matters. And they assumed that, if he were really sincere, he would make himself clear. Maybe he was as sincere as a politician can be.

There was limited time for student questions, since Blue appeared to elaborate on several things to pass the time. Like a typical politician, when questions were asked he tended to talk around them, smiling when he thought he was making particularly good sense.

The one thing that the students learned about when they visited the Speaker that day was politics. How ironic that it would be a high-ranking official, who ought to be above the low-level petty political realm, who would introduce the students to politics-as-usual. Ironic, but not surprising.

Although he was well-spoken and friendly, and the Rainbow students were grateful for the time he spent with them, his pitch was unconvincing.

He never showed the students his true colors.



Speaker of N.C. House of Representatives Dan Blue discussing state politics

Photo by Javier Martinez

Mass media must overcome questions about integrity

by Suzanne Lye

Caveat emptor: Can you really believe everything you read?

Recent incidents have suggested a frightening trend in American journalism which points to a less than ethical media.

The first disturbing incident was an NBC controversy over a rigged test of General Motors truck fuel tanks, which resulted in the resignation of NBC news president Michael Gartner. About the same time USA Today, the nation's largest selling paper, was blasted for running a picture of five gun-waving gang members with a gang violence story, when in fact, the

youths had posed for a story on a community program called guns-for-jobs.

Where do reporters draw the line? The answer too often is nowhere. There is no agreed upon set of ethical rules for reporters and editors. Since the First Amendment guarantees the right to a free press, there have been no successful efforts to regulate this growing, chimerical beast, which feeds on the darkest aspects of human life and the curiosity of perverted individuals.

Journalistic ethics has to do with the question of fairness. Yes, both newspapers and TV take po-

etic license in depicting people and events. But that license is not carte blanche. If NBC had informed the public that the GM truck had been rigged for greater clarity in the story, then GM might never have filed a suit against the network and Gartner would still have a job.

The work of a newspaper is not only to inform, but also to bring clear, startling insight and experience to segments of society that may not know what is happening in the world around them. Journalism should give human beings a sense of connection with each other in the basic struggle for survival.

Inaccurately portrayed stories like the one in USA Today and the NBC news not only reinforces the separations of race and class, but also misrepresents corporations by negatively stereotyping inner city gang members and corporations. Such misrepresentation makes an audience ask, What is the truth? When a newspaper or television network misinforms its audience, it breaks a trust that is not easily re-acquired.

Unfortunately, the solution is not as easy to define as the problem. In a survey of editors by the Associated Press Managing Editors, over half of the respondents said

the recent controversies have caused credibility problems for their publications. However, a whopping 67.9 percent said that they had not done anything to change or reassure their readers.

There are two ways to promote honesty. The first route is through responsibility. It starts at the top and works its way down. Editors should set an example for their writers by pulling out those dusty journalistic ethics guideline books and enforcing the codes. Further down in the hierarchy, if reporters took personal responsibility to double-check information with their sources, inaccuracies and misquotes

would be reduced dramatically.

The second route is through community action. If readers are outraged about a story, they can scream their anger to the wind and nothing will result. However, if those people wrote a letter to the newspaper or TV station expressing deep concern, some change could occur. One thoughtful, persuasive person can make the media know they have gone too far.

With journalistic responsibility and community involvement, newspapers and TV can depict reality honestly and fairly. Then maybe, just maybe, we can again begin to trust.

Basketball not only career path for black youth

by Michael Lee

Why do people see a young black man and assume he's just a basketball player and not a budding artist or a developing scientist, or even a future politician? Why do some people deal in stereotypes?

My experience at the Rainbow Institute was somewhat awkward because the institute coincided with Dean Smith's Basketball camp.

I enjoyed playing with the campers in my spare time, but I didn't enjoy being labeled as a camper by everyone I came in contact with. No matter where I was, people assumed that I was a basketball camper.

I admit that I am a tall, black male, with a decent jump shot, but why must all young black males be

labeled as just basketball players?

One day, I walked into a store in Chapel Hill and this kid said that he saw me playing basketball the other day.

He asked, "What group are you with," referring to the various basketball camp groups.

I replied, "I'm not in the camp, I'm here for the Rainbow Institute, a journalism workshop."

All his little friends began giggling and the boy said, "No you're not."

Again I said I was in the journalism workshop, but the child said I wasn't, maybe my jump shot is better than I thought it was. Finally I gave in and said that I was in the camp, to drop the subject.

"We knew it," a couple of the

little boys said, and continued their shopping.

That conversation probably meant nothing to the kids, but it will linger with me for a long time. It made me feel bad because other people feel that if you are tall and black there's nothing for you but basketball.

Little did they know that I am also an artist, a writer, and a number of other things.

Later in the week, when some of the other journalists from the Rainbow Institute began playing basketball with me, it became evident to the campers that I was indeed a journalist, but I came across another conflict.

Everyone began to make fun of us as we played against the camp-

ers. Through the game we heard remarks like, "You guys going to write a story about how you lost?"

Taunt after taunt and all of the other journalists seemed to take it in stride. But for some reason inside, I felt as if I was being chastised for being a black male trying to make something of himself outside sports.

What upset me more was that through all of the remarks that were made, I knew that many of those players saw basketball as their only escape and hope for a brighter future.

I began thinking that this was a problem more with society than with the individual campers.

Many black male youth dream

of "being like Mike." It seems that the only image portrayed of blacks on television are athletes. Rarely are black doctors and lawyers shown on television, so young kids look at some athletes successes and begin to idolize them.

In 1968, reporter Jack Olsen wrote in an article, "The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story," in Sports Illustrated, of "the countless Negroes who obviously had abundant will and determination to succeed, but who dedicated their childhoods and energies to (sports). If there were other ways out and up, they were blinded to them by the successes of a few sports celebrities."

As I see it, the problem is that when people focus on sports alone

and success in athletics doesn't occur, there is little or nothing remaining for them.

I felt that many of the campers fit into that characterization and focus too heavily on athletics. Programs like the Dean Smith basketball camp are good to help players improve their games, but it may be detrimental to society because in the process of focusing on basketball, we may in turn lose a future doctor, lawyer, engineer, or even a journalist.

When the media and society as a whole begins to focus on black accomplishments and educational opportunities outside of sports then, and only then, will people look at tall, black males as something other than just a basketball player.

Rainbow experience shows what it's like to be the minority

by Ben Pillow

As I drove from my hometown of Beaufort, S.C., to UNC-CH for the Freedom Forum Rainbow Institute, I felt many different things, ranging from anticipation to fear to excitement. Now, at the conclusion of the Institute, I feel the program has fulfilled all of the wishes and desires I hoped it would contain.

Being the only "non-minority" at the Rainbow Institute, designed primarily for minorities to increase minority employment in journalism, I did have some anticipatory worries and concerns coming into the workshop. Would I be accepted? Would it be difficult for me to smoothly associate with the other 13 people who were coming? As it turned out, I quickly put to rest these trivial concerns.

After our first day, I realized everyone here was mature beyond most of my peers and there was no reason for worries about not being accepted. I was the first one to arrive, and my anticipation doubled as I waited for the others. But as soon as Jamal Jafari, an Asian-American from Gaithersburg, Md., and Michael Lee, an African-American from Kansas City, Mo., intro-

duced themselves and we started talking, relief subdued my concerns.

We met Julius Chambers, chancellor at N.C. Central University, July 6, and he told us one reason for racial tension today was because people of different races didn't know how to communicate. That is the reason I think our group got along so well - we knew how to communicate.

At one point during the Institute, there was a concern that cliques were developing and excluding some students. We stayed up until almost 3 a.m. and brought all of our feelings out into the open and explained our own ideas and problems. It ended up being a very emotional and enlightening night for all of us and we gained a better understanding of each other.

For me personally, this program has almost been like a dream come true. I now know exactly what I want to do, pursue a career in journalism, and just working with our faculty foursome of Jan Elliott, Chuck Stone, David Hawpe and Merv Aubespain has been the most valuable educational experience one could ask for.

From Chuck's acquaintances,

to Uncle Merv's experiences, to David's butchering of my stories, and Jan's ability to keep it all together, I can honestly say I've learned more about journalism than in three years of high school together.

And Harry Amana. He taught me more about writing stories and leads by simply finding things wrong that I get applauded for in my high school newspaper.

The entire feeling, however, surrounding the whole Institute has been the greatest part. The almost celebrity attention we get from the entire faculty and UNC-CH makes the hard work we've all done in high school worth it. The one-on-one opportunities available to us anytime has really been this program's best asset.

So, as I prepare to return to Beaufort with all these new volumes of information I can use for my senior year and future career, I feel extremely honored and privileged I was part of the Rainbow Institute.

I will always be grateful to everyone who gave me this opportunity and the chance to enjoy it, and these are definitely three weeks and 18 people I will never forget.

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