

UNC: Insufficient Funds and Moral Bankruptcy

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Ink Contributor

We are all housekeepers. Our community is our home, and we are responsible for its upkeep, the well-being of its inhabitants, and the dirt that falls on the floor of our home. In a community, we all share in its benefits and its burdens.

In our national community, there is the phenomenon of the

the bottom of a well, up to their necks in frustration. The University's administration has dropped a rope down the well, but the rope is far too short. In addition, it has said to the housekeepers, "See, we've done the best we could. So what if the rope does not reach its destination? Take what you can get and shut up."

The University's short rope was the recent pay raise, which

Housekeepers wanted meaningful catapult training programs so that they could gain the skills necessary to receive higher paying jobs. UNC's housekeepers also wanted a fairer supervisory system in which they are treated with respect as adults.

We, the students, who inhabit the same community that the housekeepers as university employees inhabit, should ask ourselves several questions: What if we worked as housekeepers? What if I were one of the 400 housekeepers who wanted to take part in the apprenticeship program? Would I feel like I had access to that program if only two positions in that program existed? The answer is — probably not.

The apprenticeship program is available for about 1 percent of the housekeepers and grounds keepers. Indeed, I would have better odds as a student securing acceptance into any Ivy League graduate or professional program than I would as a housekeeper trying to get into the apprenticeship program. With the new clerical program that has been opened to housekeepers, the number of total spaces available in the training programs only rises to just over 20.

Let us not forget about the 30 scholarships awarded to UNC employees and their families last year. Only two out of those 30 scholarships went to housekeepers. And these two scholarships, which housekeepers received, were considerably less than any of the other awards. In short, the opportunities for housekeepers here are restricted. And these opportunities are difficult to access.

The fact is that the problems of the working poor hurt the children of our communities. Today, one in five children—12 million—live in poverty. Children are twice as likely as any other group to be poor. Most poor children have working parents.

There are also racial differences among children living in poverty. Seventy percent of

black children are poor while only 30 percent of white children are poor. These figures show how serious the problems of the working poor are and how badly they need to be addressed because the children in our communities are the adults of tomorrow.

These children see their parents work from sun up until sun down. Their parents are adults who are following the American values of hard work and thrift. Yet, there is no reward. There is no American dream. There is no "life, liberty, (or) pursuit of happiness." Their children see a nightmare of racial and economic injustice.

The "dream" that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had has turned into a poke of lies shattered under the voice of a power structure that throws up its hands shouting, "We've done enough for these people. What more do

they want?"

As we debate the merits of "doing something about the housekeepers," we amputate a part of our community. We make their lives exclusive from our own. We say that to improve the conditions of our working poor will come at a cost. But so did ending slavery. So too did ending segregation. No one ever said that justice was easy.

In our Bicentennial year whose theme is "Community" and whose keynote speaker spoke of the necessity for "change," the UNC housekeepers have attempted to cash that check of "change" and "community." Unfortunately, our university leadership has returned to the housekeepers both of the checks marked "Insufficient Funds." And UNC's housekeepers continue down a road of "No Outlet."



Most housekeepers are Black women.

working poor. Many work hard for their money, a 40-hour week, yet they are still below the poverty line. Those who are slightly above the poverty line rest on the threshold between the nastiness of a national statistic and the sociopolitical road signs that indicate that there is "No Outlet." No outlet for better jobs. No outlet for more training. Jim Crow wears a new dress, and he is fierce.

In Gloria Naylor's made for television mini-series, "The Women of Brewster Place," Mattie laments, "It seems like every time black folks try to do a little something, somebody always got to be throwing up a wall."

—The UNC Housekeepers' Movement can understand Mattie's lament. The movement is composed of a group of workers on this campus who have never asked for a handout—only a hand up. They have been dropped to

came as a result of years of lobbying ("noise making") by the UNC Housekeepers Movement. The University was shamed into this action. After all, housekeepers were paid poverty wages.

The images were too shocking. The workers in the lowest pay grade were largely black and female. Slavery seemed to have transformed into sharecropping, and sharecropping into jobs with the lowest pay grades. UNC's housekeepers were not calling for a short rope or a pat on the back. Nor were they groveling for cold slabs of meat for Thanksgiving dinner or canned goods at Christmas time. Instead, they wanted equity.

UNC's housekeepers wanted wages that would permit them to secure adequate child care, and wages that would enable them to stop working second and third jobs just to make a living.

For far too long our brothers and sisters have been living in poverty. **This must end!** With student support, the Housekeeper's Association (HKA) has made progress. **BUT**, the following 5 basic goals have not been reached:

- Recognition of HKA as the official representative body of UNC Housekeepers
- Chancellor Hardin's commitment to meeting with the HKA Steering Committee
- \$16,000 minimum salary
- Efficient training for advancement
- An end to demeaning working conditions

EVERY WEDNESDAY AT 5:30 CAMPUS Y BASEMENT

THIS IS A TIME FOR ACTION!!!

JOIN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST MODERN-DAY SLAVERY. COME TO **WE ARE ALL HOUSEKEEPERS** MEETINGS!

A PORTRAIT OF MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

- 14,500 Typical UNC Housekeeper's Salary
- 135,000 Chancellor Hardin's Salary (plus house, car, and state-paid housekeeper)
- 90 Percentage of UNC Housekeepers that are African-American
- 70 Percentage of UNC Housekeepers that are Women