

# commentary

## Editorials

### 'Heal': Another Code Word

The announcement by N.C. Attorney General Mike Easley of his decision not to seek a new trial for Michael Seagroves was frankly not unexpected. But the obligatory call for "healing" in the community, is really disgusting.

The community would not need to "heal" if an injury had not occurred. The injury we think is clear. Jamal Elliott and company had no business at the Seagroves' residence. If no shots had been fired and they had been apprehended, taken to court and a trial was held on the evidence of attempting to steal, then no one in the African American community would have said a word. As many would say and expound the concept, "You break the law, you must be prepared to pay the price."

Sounds simple.

This is the concept we've had constantly drilled into us and that this is the way the system works.

Only Mike Easley makes it clear there is a difference.

He makes the case that none of the boys were credible witnesses because of past criminal behavior and this crime in particular. Understand that when one faces jail, one will seek any way to stay out of jail. Maybe this is "self-preservation."

But with Michael Seagroves accused of a crime, it seems to become different. Although Seagroves is heard on tape at the time of his 911 call saying he was trying to shoot the people breaking into his house, it changes when, with legal counsel at hand and probably an explanation of the law, that that wasn't what he was trying to do. When asked to explain why, if he shot at the intruders as they were facing him, the bullets ended up in everyone's back, apparently the only law he broke was one of the laws of physics.

Is he not trying to stay out of jail?

The justice system is supposed to be "color-blind." Just present the evidence and everyone is entitled to a fair hearing.

After hearing all of this evidence, it increasingly appears that the full weight of the justice system weighs in only when the victim is white and the assailant is an African American.

That's why the call to the community to "heal" rings hollow.

We think the call is to say "Black folks, don't burn down downtown, the malls or, heaven forbid, the suburbs where we live."

Rioting doesn't solve anything. But history has shown when the perception of fairness leaves, other more violent forms of relief are sought.

Too often the sense is "we can put African Americans in jail if they commit a crime, but we can't put somebody white in jail if they commit one." Too often the excuse is that "this case is different." The question to us is simple. With all things being the same, if three white teens broke into someone's home in Emory Woods, and an African American homeowner shot the teens in the back, would the verdict have been the same?

With the call for a Justice Department investigation, many will accuse the Durham Committee, the NAACP, and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of keeping Durham from "healing." Some of those calls will come from individuals and groups who have done a great deal to create the injury and now have the need for healing. They have spent considerable effort to foment division here. We don't need to talk, we don't need to have conferences or workshops or prayer meetings. All we need is equal justice.

Easley notes that he doubted that he could have gotten a conviction in Durham. In other words, white Durham citizens are not going to convict someone white for committing a crime against black citizens. We note this comes at a time when the third trial of Byron de la Beckwith for the assassination of Medgar Evers gets underway. One of the reasons for this trial, was that it was understood in many parts of the South in the sixties, no white man would be convicted of killing a black man.

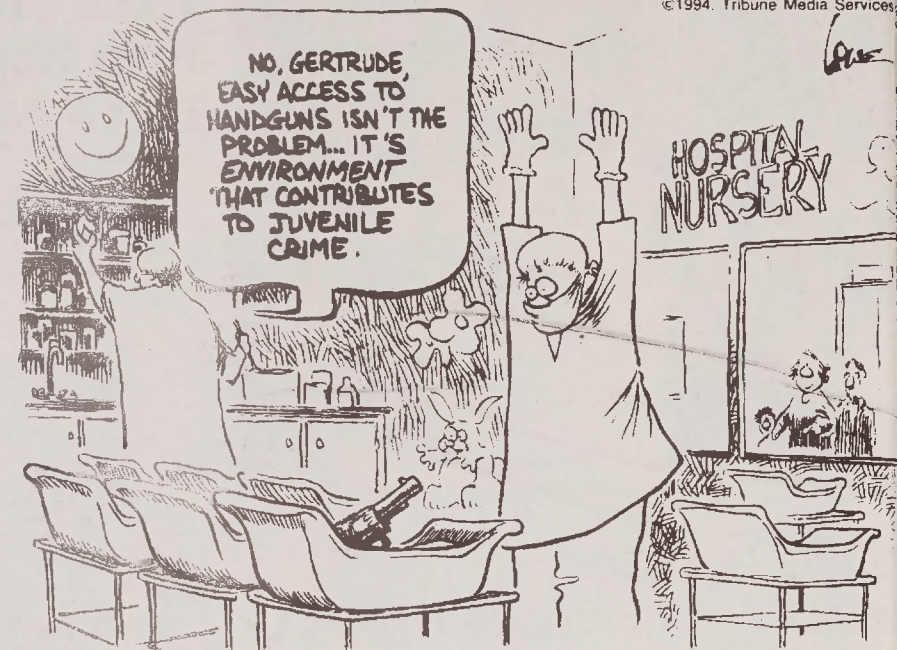
Unfortunately, Easley's decision sounds eerily familiar.

### Abating Crime Requires Getting Rid Of Our Rotten Fruit

Talk about crime is everywhere these days. It's on the lips of just about everybody. Opinions abound about what can or should be done about the situation. On this page are three commentaries on crime — one by Ron Daniels in Vantage Point, another by John Jacob in To Be Equal, and another in the Civil Rights Journal by Bernice Powell Jackson — all containing pertinent information, legitimate points and recommendations.

Everybody talks about what they consider to be "root causes" but nobody seems to take into account what we believe is the real root cause of crime. Fruit does not fall far from its tree and we believe America's tree has yielded so much bitter fruit that we no longer have any way to dispose of it, disguise it or hide it. That's why it threatens everybody.

We believe the wrongdoings of this nation through the 500 years beginning with Christopher Columbus have yielded so much bitter fruit for so long that its rotting condition has become dangerously poisonous. This nation has been immoral and criminal from its beginning. It has done many



good things but it has also done many evil things. It proclaims more good than it actually merits, and, over the years, has manufactured grandiose terms for its evils.

We do not deny that America could have been a paragon of virtue if its early developers had adhered to the ideals of its founding and if those who wanted to be just had demanded that all would "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." My, what a land it could have been!

But no, an increasing number went the other way — I, me, mine. They didn't (and still don't) concern themselves with right and wrong. Just get money. They did (and still do) whatever it takes to amass wealth.

America had the potential to develop into the finest example of democracy ever known to humankind, but early idealism was abandoned in favor of satisfying personal greed. Thus, by the thousands, people were forced to eat the bitter fruit of poverty and subsistence living, most times fully aware that they were being cheated, abused, misused.

Those who abandoned idealism and planted thousands of bitter fruit trees are the real criminals responsible for the roots of today's crime. They are the ones who bear responsibility for poisoning this nation. They are the ones who set the tone for today's crime. This is no excuse for criminals, but it is a reason for today's crime problem.

It's not too late today to remedy the situation, but we can't afford to put off action much longer. Time is running out on America. We can salvage our nation and make it what it claims to be. We must take strident measures now to rid this nation of its bitter fruit trees.

America needs to stop filling children's heads with that "manifest destiny" garbage and other high-sounding terminology in their American history classes to justify this nation's heinous actions through the years. When America quits telling its citizens one lie after another about almost everything; when America stops exchanging morality for conformity; it will begin to heal some of the mess in which it finds itself today. Building prisons and jails, churning out one carelessly crafted law against crime after another, continuing to "dress up" and deny the true history of this nation is the same as continuing to pile more rotten fruit on generation after generation. If this is the diet we continue to feed citizens, we can never expect better physical and mental health, individually or collectively.

America ought to face up to its beginnings, its true history, and try to begin to undo some of the wrongs it has done.

Yes, they are bitter pills, but pills we need desperately to swallow if we are going to be a truly great nation in years to come.

America should start with the Native Americans from whom this land was stolen; whose societies were lied to and destroyed; who were massacred unmercifully. There is no way we can repay Native Americans for the damages done to them, but this nation could at least begin some honest compensatory actions with some of the money now earmarked for building prisons. That would be proof of the nation's resolve to rid itself of poison fruit. Incidentally, the first Europeans on these shores would have starved to death if the Native Americans hadn't taught them how to survive.

Then there are the African Americans who were shamefully mistreated. America could begin to admit the truth about how Africans did the dirty work, without pay, in building this country. They were unable to build this nation without the free backbreaking work of the Africans. Teach all of the children not only the shameful truth of the slave trade's physical and mental torture of human beings, but also about

the unending list of contributions, inventions, accomplishments of those same people, brought here unwillingly, abused mercilessly with families deliberately split and made forbidden. They should be taught how government promises to them were never fulfilled after so-called Emancipation, thus driving them into dire poverty while the slavemasters prospered.

Then there are the Chinese who were used, abused, lied to, stolen from and treated like dirt to build a railroad system across vast stretches of America, and the robber barons became filthy rich in the process.

The list goes on, of course.

We need to dig deep down into our nation's history, drive money, laws, efforts and rewriting of history until we reach the solid rock of the whole truth and enable every son who wants a job to have one. Then and only then can America have a firm basis from which to move into the century.

When we have done these things, we will begin to rid ourselves of the reasons for "high-brow" or "low-brow" crime, and thus the criminals.

All of the police officers on the street, laws passed nationally and locally, and all other "stop-gap" measures are in the sky. They are meaningless. They are futile.

### Civil Rights Journal

## A New Year's Resolution For Us All

By Bernice Powell Jackson

African Americans face the possibility that we will become endangered species on earth. Like the bald eagle and others on the government's list, we, too, face extinction. It is the most frightening fate of any people — the annihilation of a race.

Yet, today, at a time when our country is at "peace," young African men living in our cities are more likely to die of wounds than a U.S. soldier was to be killed on a tour of duty during Vietnam War, according to *Essence Magazine*. Every six hours an African American male is killed. Every six hours, in 1990 alone, a child under 10 were killed — the numbers in the years since are higher.

The Surgeon General of the U.S. estimates that some 135,000 carry guns to school every day. Another estimate is that one in every high school student carries a gun to school.

Two months ago the *Washington Post* reported on eleven and young olds who were planning their funerals instead of their proms; young people have seen so much random violence in their brief lives they had no expectation of living into adulthood. It's not just violence.

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