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EDITORIALS

Upshaw's mistake

IS A MAN'S future worth nine dollars?

The former assistant to Winston-Salem's public works director, Larry V. Upshaw, must have pondered that question during the past two weeks.

Upshaw, 34 and universally acknowledged as a bright, likable community leader, pleaded guilty last week to stealing nine dollars from a secretary's purse. He had confessed earlier to police that he took the money and was charged with misdemeanor larceny.

Why Upshaw, a former football star who was head of security at Salem College before joining the city, took the money in the first place remains puzzling. Nine bucks certainly won't pay the mortgage.

Why the secretary insisted on pressing charges after Upshaw's arrest and subsequent resignation is even more puzzling.

Though a man should pay for his crimes, Upshaw appeared to have suffered sufficiently for what he did. Gone was a promising job. His reputation was sullied, his credibility as a professional with a law-enforcement background damaged. He and his family must live with the embarrassment and humiliation until time heals the wounds.

Weren't those things punishment enough?

That Upshaw additionally had to face his day in court over nine dollars seems not only extreme, but vindictive. Though Upshaw's transgression was unprofessional, illegal and plain dumb, his case resembles those routinely referred to the Neighborhood Justice Center for mediation. Were Upshaw's suspended jail sentence and requirement to perform community service that important to the secretary, who at first denied having called the police after she discovered her money missing?

What could possibly be gained, aside from making a bad situation worse?

No one seemed so insistent on prosecution when the county's district attorney was involved in his second drunk-driving case. In fact, the district attorney's office, ironically, could have recommended that Upshaw's case be mediated at the Justice Center, rather than heard in court.

As District Judge James A. Harrill said last week while sentencing Upshaw, "We all make mistakes." Only, some of us seem to have to pay more for our mistakes than others.

As for Upshaw's future, we wish him well. If he truly wants to, he will weather this storm and learn from his error. No doubt among the lessons he has learned this summer is this one: He has learned who his real friends are.

But he can go on with his life. He can admit that he made a mistake and move on. He is young, and he still has much to offer anyone who is willing to give him a second chance. Surely he deserves that chance.

Meanwhile, someone somewhere may gloat that another black public official has bitten the dust: Former Coliseum and Convention Center Director William "Bill" McGee and former Assistant District Attorney Jean Burkins come immediately to mind.

That's about as logical as saying that white males shouldn't be president because Richard Nixon is a white male.

Still, black public officials should realize by now -- and Upshaw should have realized -- that they often don't get the breaks afforded their white counterparts. There is precious little room for errors, large or small.

And although the rules of the game are unfair and inconsistent, for now, at least, they are the rules.

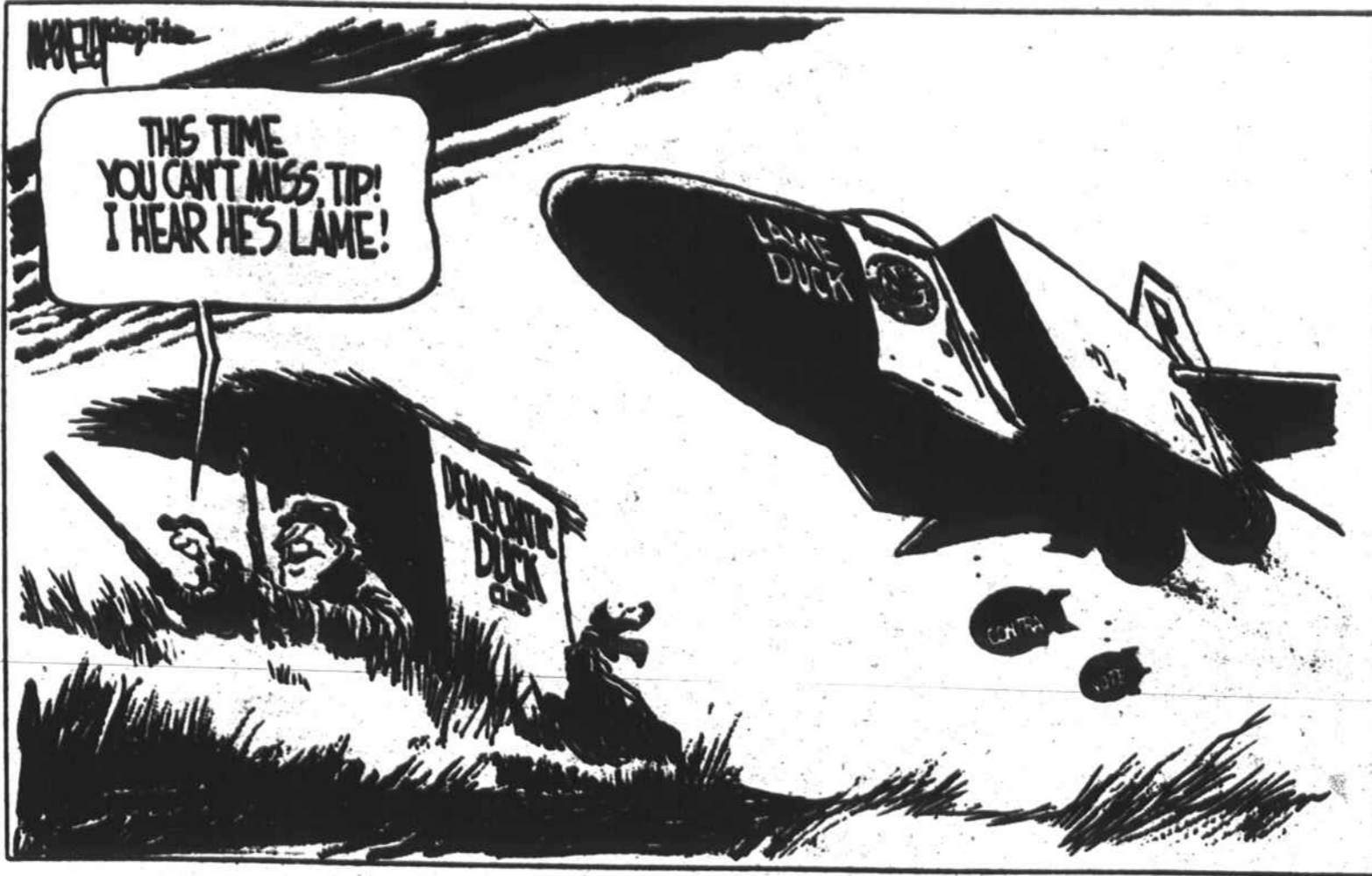
ABOUT LETTERS

The *Chronicle* welcomes letters from its readers, as well as columns. Letters should be as concise as possible and typed or printed legibly. They also should include the name, address and telephone number of the writer.

Columns should follow the same guidelines and will be published if we feel they are of interest to our general readership.

We reserve the right to edit letters for brevity and grammar.

Submit your letters and columns to *Chronicle Mailbag*, P.O. Box 3154, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102.



The United Way needs to clean house

■ The author is the president of Winston-Salem's NAACP chapter.

"You have three strikes against you: You are female, you are black and you belong to a group with no bargaining power."

In 1986, that kind of talk coming from the top administrator of United Way is reprehensible.

On June 10, in the U.S. District Court case of *Gregory vs. the United Way of Forsyth County*, Doug Ashby, director of the Forsyth County United Way, testified to charges that he often used racial slurs and cited ethnic differences as part of his administrative briefings and staff meetings.

Testifying to the charges, Ashby displayed very little racial sensitivity. As he explained his motives for using such misguided language in a United Way meeting, Ashby did his best to come across as a gentle, kind, fair and noble gentleman. Sure.

Although the discussion of race, class and gender may play an important role in certain academic settings, one must question the relevance of such discussions in United Way meetings. Other than to create a false sense of racial pride in his group and to degrade Marjorie Gregory's sex and race, such discussions serve no useful purpose. In fact, the use of racial slurs is one of the most vicious ways of showing one's intent to discriminate against an individual or group.

Mrs. Gregory had charged Forsyth County's United Way with

THE GUEST COLUMN

By WALTER MARSHALL

age, race and sex discrimination. She contended that the United Way devised a scheme to phase out her position, thus firing her through "reorganization." According to court testimony, the scenario went as follows:

Ashby developed a reorganizational plan that excluded Mrs. Gregory. To carry out his plan for promoting a young, white male to fill a newly created position, Ashby followed the usual script. He sought the approval of certain black members of his board. Also, the chairman of the

"... Blacks as a group must not be a party to our own destruction by tolerating insensitive leadership in any organization that we help to support."

United Way board secured the services of a minority-owned consulting firm to review the board's evaluation instrument and to test the black community for any possible negative repercussions from Mrs. Gregory's impending dismissal.

After securing the services of blacks to do the dirty work, it was easy for the United Way to smear Mrs. Gregory's reputation. By maximizing the minimal flaws in her leadership style, the United Way succeeded in isolating her within the agency. When Ashby's racial slurs and ethnic putdowns hurt Mrs. Gregory's ability to develop greater trust with her co-workers, his job was complete.

Mrs. Gregory had now been contaminated and quarantined.

From my observations, Mrs. Gregory was discriminated against in every sense of the term. A clear distinction was made between her and other staff members on the basis of her natural and social position as a black female. The question before us now is, what will we do to avenge and stop such acts of injustice? The fact that Doug Ashby may or may not be a carrier of negative racial attitudes is his problem. Nevertheless, blacks as a group must not be a party to our own destruction by tolerating insensitive leadership in any organization that we help to sup-

port.

The United Way is one of the most useful and helpful agencies in this country. However, nothing is so important that it must be supported at the expense of losing one's pride and dignity. To contribute funds to the Forsyth County United Way under the present circumstances is to negate our true existence as a people. Until the Forsyth County United Way rids itself of its racist leadership and cleans up its antebellum house, blacks should use other means to make their charitable contributions.

What Mrs. Gregory sought and could not obtain, either from the

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'Treemonisha' revived a can-do spirit

To The Editor:

"Treemonisha," written in 1907 by the king of ragtime, Scott Joplin, is an opera based on the story of Joplin's survival on a post-Civil War plantation in the Southwest. The opera was presented for the first time in Winston-Salem at the Stevens Center on June 13, 14 and 15.

Opera is a complex art form. Many opera buffs consider it to be the greatest of all musical expressions. Those members of the community who labored ceaselessly in the last few weeks of rehearsals will by now probably agree that opera is one of the most challenging, if not the greatest, musical forms. The combination of singing, acting, orchestral accompaniment and scene changes makes opera one arena in which geniuses are separated from normal people.

The principals -- Elizabeth P. Graham (Treemonisha), Lori Brown (Monisha), Samuel Stevenson (Ned) and William Moize (Remus) -- all possessed superb vocal instruments. Ms. Graham in particular could produce ravishingly beautiful sounds seemingly at will. She captured the admiration of all who were fortunate enough to hear her and work with her.

Charles Darden, the conductor, also commanded an enormous amount of respect from cast and orchestra alike. The final product was delightful and

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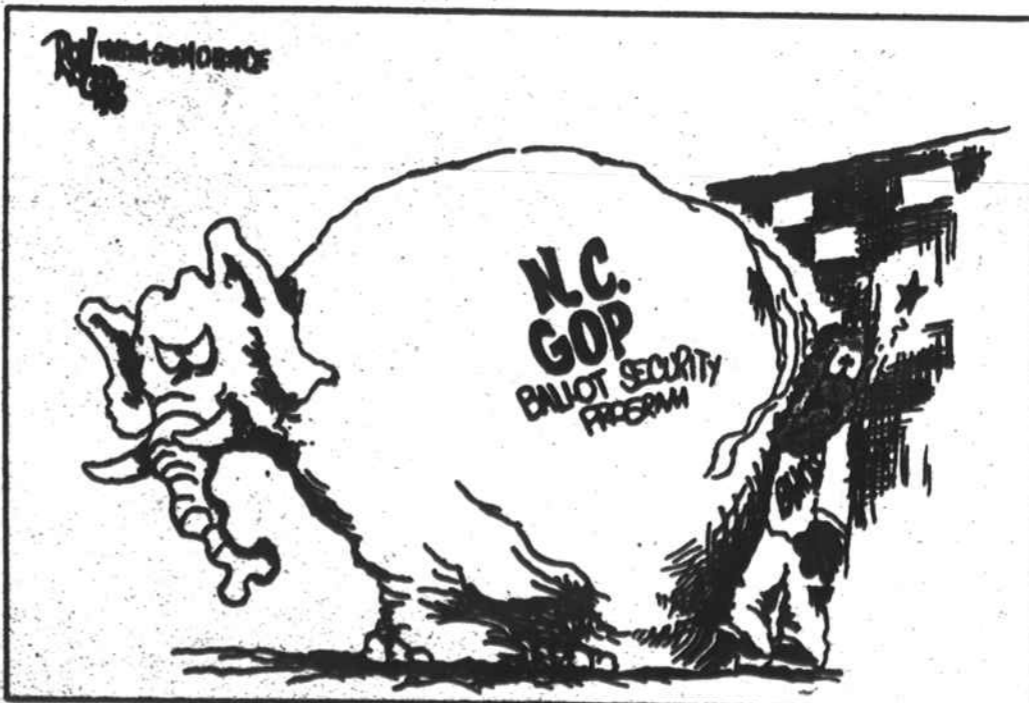
OUR READERS SPEAK OUT

the audience responded with enthusiasm.

It was my privilege to assemble the 25-piece orchestra which accompanied the chorus and soloists. Unlike the previous performances of "Treemonisha" in Houston, New York City and

was even more challenging than normal since music schools do not always feel obligated to expose their students to works by black composers. Thus, for many of the musicians, it was a first experience on many levels.

The musicians ranged in age



Charlotte, the orchestra, as well as the cast, was black.

Black instrumentalists who have had the opportunity to become experienced in a production of this kind are few and far between. It was therefore nothing short of a miracle that these 25 black musicians were able to tackle an opera score not within days, but hours, of available preparation time. The situation

from 13 years old to senior citizens. It was a pleasure to watch experienced professionals sharing their knowledge with the younger players. The conductor also participated in this sharing of experiences by handing the baton to first violinist Skipper Duckett during the last moments of the opera. Duckett, a recent graduate of the North Carolina

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CHILDWATCH

Ignorance can hurt a teen

By MARIAN W. EDELMAN
Syndicated Columnist

WASHINGTON -- "What should I tell my adolescent son about sex?" asks the mother of a 13-year-old.

"How can I talk to my parents about what is bothering me?" asks a 15-year-old boy.

Embarrassment and confusion are keeping too many parents and children from discussing sex. Parents often are afraid that opening the subject will encourage their children to become sexually active. Teens are afraid that parents will disapprove or punish them if they express any interest in their developing sexuality. The result: ignorance, a major contributor to high teen-pregnancy rates.

Families need "a new attitude and a new approach," says Christine Bond, a Boston health educator who works with teens and their families. Bond and Claradine Moore-James are co-directors of We're Educators with a Touch of Class (WEATOC), a health-education program designed to get families talking about teen sexuality.

"We believe that, if we address adolescent sexuality as a family issue, and train youth and parents effectively and consistently, that they will pass the information on to each other and their peers in a way that is natural and accepted," they say.

WEATOC gives both youth (ages 8-21) and adults the facts they need about human reproduction, sexually transmitted infections, birth control and sexual responsibility. It encourages teens to get involved in counseling other teens about important issues in their lives.

The group also sends its message widely (and entertainingly) through its teen theatre. The teen-age WEATOC members collectively create and perform a one-hour show made up of brief skits on such topics as sexuality, self-esteem, birth control and parent-child communication. In one such skit, "You're Not Listening," two girls comically and accurately portray a mother and daughter who are talking past each other. When the daughter brings up birth control, the mother immediately asks, "Are you having sex?"

WEATOC has made a difference for many of the 35 primarily minority teens who have joined. The co-directors describe one 8-year-old girl who seemed shy when she first joined, but then wrote a skit about peer pressure to use drugs. Emily Pinkney, a former member, recently spoke at a national conference about her pride in being a "peer role model" and the importance of relationships with parents and friends. None of the current or former members of the program has become pregnant.

"It's very often the uninformed adolescent that gets into trouble," warns Ms. Bond. Her work shows us one important way we can help our children stay out of trouble: By making sure they get the information they need to become sexually responsible. To learn more about this program, contact WEATOC, 26 Crawford St., Dorchester, Mass., 02120, 616-626-0221.

Marian Wright Edelman is a National Newspaper Publishers Association columnist who also is president of the Children's Defense Fund, a national voice for youth.