

Winston-Salem Chronicle

"The Twin City's Award-Winning Weekly"

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Ernest H. Pitt • Ndubisi Egemonye
Editor/Publisher Co-Founder

Member in good standing with:



Black history

Profiles in courage: an incomplete record

Recently, Wilma Holman wrote us to describe the exclusion of African-Americans from her third-grader's science book. There was no mention of Dr. Daniel H. Williams, who first successfully operated on the human heart. Not a word about Charles Drew, a leading researcher and authority on the preservation of blood plasma. Nothing about Dr. Percy L. Julian, a world-famous chemist who pioneered research that produced life-saving drugs.

Looking through her son's textbook, she finally found a photograph of a black father and son — in the chapter that discusses harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

Omitting the achievements of African-Americans from textbooks and from classroom study in general makes a dunce of all of us: black or white. Although some have tried, and continue to try to separate the heartaches and the jubilation of the peoples of America, it can not be done. The triumphs and tragedies of African-Americans is a strong thread intimately woven into the cloth of this country's heritage.

Ancient African families were close-knit. But in America, the white slaveholder's practice of selling off family members one-by-one had a devastating effect on the black family unit.

The United States Supreme Court legalized the "separate but equal" doctrine in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896. As a result, every aspect of life for blacks fell under Jim Crow laws: separate bathrooms and drinking fountains, separate doors and waiting lines for blacks in post offices, stores, libraries, public buildings. Black children were sentenced to attend dilapidated, poorly heated schools and use outdated, worn-out text books.

This was America's law, not the law of black people.

Literacy tests were used to keep blacks from voting. This practice is not black history: it is America's history. It reveals much more about white Americans than it does about black Americans.

America's history of civil disobedience, a vibrant sign of our independence, was largely acted out by blacks and whites trying to influence public opinion about the unfairness of Jim Crow laws and later, subtle forms of oppression.

Jazz, the only native form of music in this country, was born of black spirituals, blues songs and work songs. R&B (rhythm and blues) was nothing more than folk music before it was heavily influenced by the heartbeat of black musicians.

Hundreds of black visual artists are never invited to exhibit their work by the elite who control our nation's museums and who devalue and misunderstand the African-American perspective. In the absence of African-American art galleries, and omitted from art texts, their work remains invisible. Will they continue to be omitted from record?

The history of America is an incomplete record if it excludes the legacy of thirty million Americans of African descent. The whole is equal to more than the sum of its parts: let's recognize and embrace them all.

About letters . . .

The *Winston-Salem Chronicle* welcomes letters from its readers, as well as columns.

Letters should be as concise as possible and should be 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 and columns for brevity and grammar.

Submit your letters and columns to:

Chronicle Mailbag

P.O. Box 1636

Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102

Disappointment in city's MLK Day address

To the Editor:

I was deeply disturbed by what I observed at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration recently held at the convention center. On his important national and state holiday commemorating the life of the slain civil rights leader, I expected the program to provide some insight on the relevance of Dr. King's legacy to the myriad of problems facing this country and its African-American citizens. I was sadly disappointed.

The keynote address was delivered by Benjamin S. Ruffin, vice president of corporate affairs, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. My expectations of Mr. Ruffin, like that of the overflow crowd that included many African-American youths, were great.

Mr. Ruffin is a well-known figure in North Carolina's African-American community, whose good works on behalf of the community I have long admired. In addition, he is a man who has employed unique access to institutions of corporate and political power. Before attaining his present position, Mr. Ruffin served as a special assistant to Governor Jim Martin and later as a corporate executive at the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Co.

Given his experiences, the importance of the occasion and the unique opportunity to address an attentive gathering of youths, I was shocked that Mr. Ruffin delivered a speech that was severely lacking in substance.

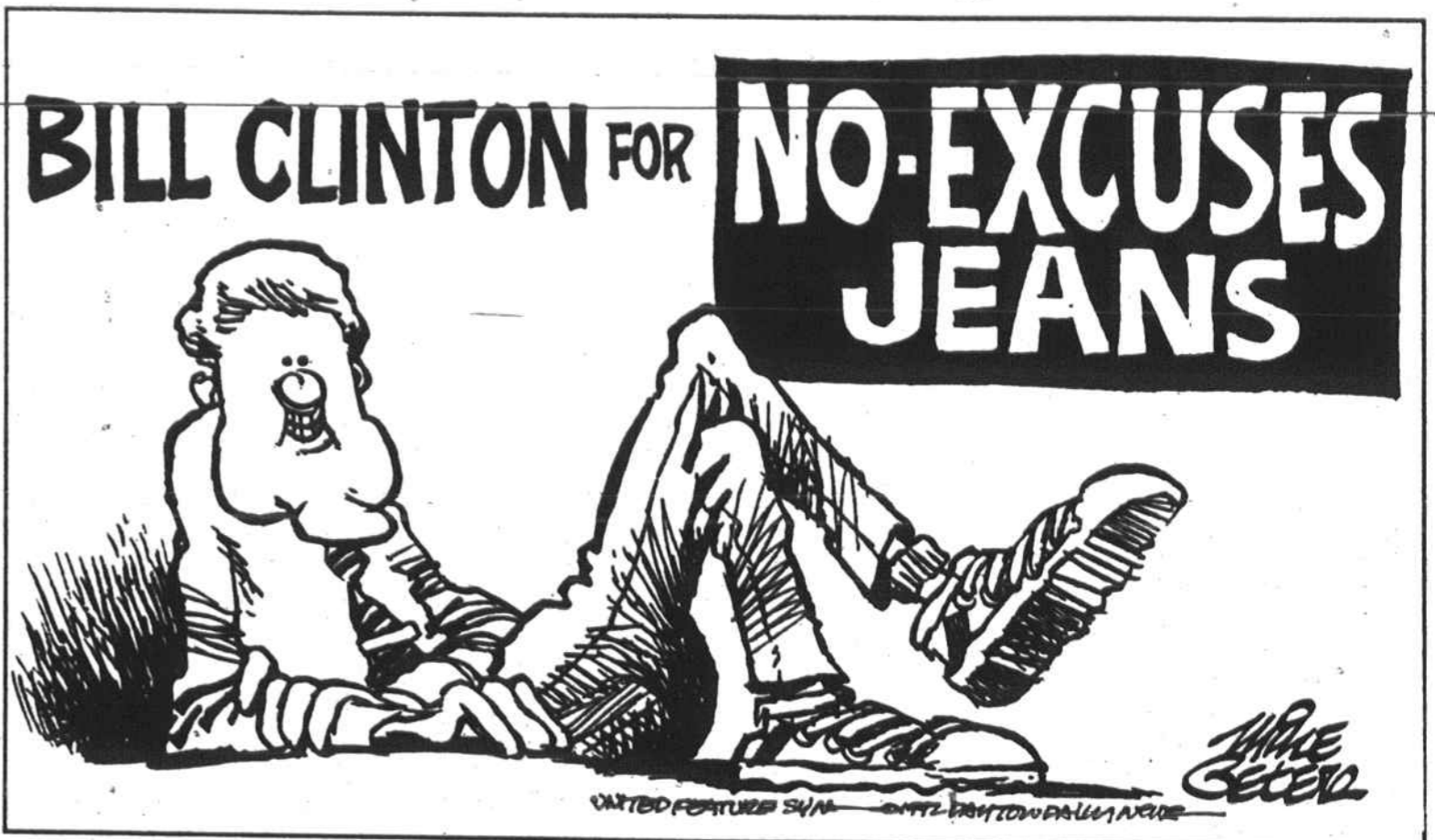
The content of the speech ranged from a vague cry for the audience to "hold on," to an arousing criticism of the hairstyles of young African-American males. Mr. Ruffin's speech, which evoked the imagery of religion, through references to popular biblical characters, was delivered with the thundering emotionalism and eloquence that had made him a much sought-after speaker in the African-American community.

This delivery style, combined with biblical references, was successful in arousing the emotions of many in attendance. However, what was shockingly missing from this speech was any thoughtful analysis of current issues facing this country and its African-American citizens and virtually no prescription for action, other than a vague cry to "hold on."

Mr. Ruffin near the end of his speech did manage to urge the audience to "hold on" by supporting black banks and other institutions. However, even this call for action lacked thoughtful analysis.

Ruffin chastised the audience for not supporting black institutions. But he failed to explain, in a clear and specific way, why supporting these institutions is crucial (as it surely is) to the survival and well-being of the African-American community.

Without such analysis, many people no doubt walked away from the speech with no greater insight into or appreciation for the need to support black institutions, and therefore with no greater inclination to change their behavior. African-



CHRONICLE MAILBAG

Our Readers Speak Out

Americans, like any other citizens deserve an explanation from those who urge us to change our behavior. If supporting black institutions is in our best interest, (and I believe it is), our leaders should take the time to explain the benefits to us in a clear and thoughtful manner. Speeches that are purely motivational may be fine, and are often quite enjoyable, in certain instances.

However, given the need for clearly-communicated goals, strategies and plans of action to address the problem facing the African-American community, it is difficult to understand how so many in attendance at the rally could be satisfied by a speech so lacking in substance or thoughtful analysis.

It is especially ironic that a speech commemorating the life of Dr. King would lack essential critique of, or a plan of action to address, the many problems currently facing African-Americans. Dr. King used his education and unique experiences to formulate a thoughtful analysis of the issues facing the world in which he lived.

From this analysis King developed concrete plans of action to address the problems facing African-Americans and others, which he gladly shared with anyone who cared to listen. It is this legacy we should remember and strive to uphold when commemorating the life of Dr. King.

By this measure, the vague message delivered by Mr. Ruffin, though evocative and at times eloquent, fell sadly short.

I write this letter, not to criticize Mr. Ruffin, but rather to articulate a new standard for leadership in our community. Today, perhaps more than ever, we need clear and specific analyses of, and plans of action to address our many problems. We must demand such from ourselves and our leaders, especially our leaders whose education and experiences have uniquely qualified them for this task.

Sincerely,
Kenneth W. Lewis

Praise for WAAA

To the Editor:

The 12th Annual Noon Hour Commemoration program in honor of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sponsored by radio station WAAA on Jan. 20, was truly outstanding.

It was gratifying to see the increasing number of supporters of Dr. King's ideals participate in the celebration each year, particularly our young people.

The speaker for the occasion, Benjamin Ruffin, had a tremendously insightful and profound message for us all when he challenged us to continue the work that Dr. King began.

For over 40 years, WAAA has been a good and dependable neighbor and an integral part of this community.

Much credit should be given to station owner Mütter Evans for continuing that tradition and helping inspire us all.

Yours truly,
Warren C. Oldham
Representative
67th District

Sad state in Denver

To the Editor:

As we recently celebrated the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. across our nation, I could not help but be saddened by the incidences that occurred in Denver.

Although I have my own belief regarding the issuing of the permit, I was even more concerned about the statement of the young African-American male that stated "nothing was ever solved peacefully, peace has never worked."

This letter is an appeal for all parents to take 20 minutes after reading this and talk with your children about Dr. King and his peace movements.

I have to believe that the young man mentioned above is not aware of the works of Dr. King nor the importance of assertiveness over

aggressiveness.

If each of you will take the time to have this conversation with your youth and encourage them to share this with at least two other youth then perhaps incidences like Denver will not occur.

This 20 minute discussion should be only the beginning to many more conversations with your children.

I also encourage all programs that work with youth and meet with them on any regular bases to have the same discussion, program coordinators, teachers, church leaders alike.

Together, one at a time we can make a difference.

Sincerely,
Yvonne P. Booker
Coordinator,
Teen Talk Program

Women drivers?!

To the Editor:

This letter offers some free advice to your readers. Seat Belts are justified. Wear them.

I am a relative newcomer to Winston-Salem. This is a wonderful city in which to live.

However, there is one thing that really ticks me off! Women drivers. I have driven the street of Winston-Salem for two years now. I have lived in Washington, D.C., New York and California, but never have I suffered such horrors.

These women here drive like Bats out'a hell. I have never seen anything like it. I always move over to help give them all the room they need to get on down the road. You cruise the speed limit and they come up to you so fast. There are some very dangerous women on these city streets.

I hope that some of the community leaders can do something about this hazard to life and limb.

Sincerely,
William Hunter

My country 'tis full of hypocrites

Prominent black democrats have fanned out across the country to tell black people that Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas, the presidential hopeful and accused adulterer, is the best friend they have among the white men running for President.

For example, the black female Speaker of the House in Texas was being hugged too tightly by the freckled-faced Clinton in an AP picture in the major media.

"I don't know about you, but I want a man for president, not God," she exhorted to an audience of enthusiastic fellow democratic endorsers.

I've neither met God nor had a conversation with Him, but I'm sure He is not interested in being President of the United States either.

But I do suspect that God is also wondering how black leaders could be out on the stump selling a man who just slandered Italian-Americans as a group.

Since the "man" is the choice of the black democrat from Texas, what kind of man is "Slick Willie,"

as Clinton is known to his fellow Arkansans.

By now, you know that Jennifer Flowers, self-confessed lover

demeanor."

Clinton: "Boy, he is so aggressive."

Flowers: "Well, he seems like



TONY BROWN

Syndicated Columnist

of the same-time married Gov. Clinton, calls him a "liar." He also slurred Italian-Americans in a taped telephone conversation with the former Miss Teenage America and part-time singer.

The want-to-be president Clinton acknowledged that he called New York's first Italian-American governor a "mean son-of-a-bitch" who "acts like a Mafioso."

The conversation between the singer-outside-lover and Arkansas' number one "good ol' boy" went like this:

Flowers: "Well, I don't particularly care for Cuomo's uh,

he could get real mean (laughs)."

Clinton: "(garbled) . . . mean son-of-a-bitch."

Flowers: "Yeah . . . I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't have some Mafioso major connections."

Clinton: "Well, he acts like one."

What Clinton means is that Cuomo's dark complexion and Mediterranean swagger are evil in appearance. Therefore, the racist logic assumes that anyone not blond and Nordic is a natural criminal.

Clinton's lame, racist apology was just as bad and insensitive. He expresses regrets "if" his remarks

"left anyone with the impression that I was disrespectful to either Gov. Cuomo or Italian-Americans."

"What do you mean 'if'?" Cuomo shot back. "If you're not capable of understanding what was said, then don't try to apologize."

Clinton's bigotry "was part of an ugly syndrome that strikes Italian-Americans, Jewish people, blacks, women . . ." Cuomo said. Clinton's comments raise more questions about his attitudes toward race and ethnicity that it does about who he sleeps with — which hold little interest for me.

That means it bears on his ability to be fair with 30 million African-Americans who cast 25% of the votes for democrats and to judge honestly women or people of different ethnic backgrounds.

But some black democratic leaders, only concerned about what they will personally get out of a Clinton presidency, have said to hell with Clinton's racism as long as it pays off for them.

They will, you might say, embrace the devil if it pays off.