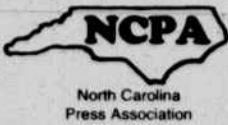


# OPINION

## Winston-Salem Chronicle

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### The Last Word on O.J.

#### ENOUGH!

A couple of weeks ago, "Tonight Show" host Jay Leno joked that Australia had been awarded the O.J. Simpson trial for 1998. That joke might even be funny were it not for the episodic nature of Simpson's criminal and civil trials.

For nearly three years, the O.J. Simpson trial has dominated major media coverage. And though the question is moot, we still beg to ask: Did the double-murders really deserve the attention they received? Granted, all the elements were present to make this the trial of the century: a beautiful blond victim, sexual innuendo, wealth, race and a star-athlete-turned-movie-star defendant? What could be more scintillating?

Certainly not President Clinton's State of the Union address, which last week competed for headlines with the civil trial verdict. Leave it to Simpson watchers to marginalize the chief of state.

No one could have predicted that the sensationalized case would generate interest for so long. In the ever-widening arena of tabloid journalism, only the murders of Bill Cosby's son, Ennis, and of six-year-old beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey eclipsed O.J. Simpson's travails. And that was only briefly, while the Simpson civil trial wound down. In the meantime, pressing issues, such as poverty, education and politics, were relegated to side shows.

So, in the interest of closing the curtain on this Hollywood horror story and returning to real life, here is the last word on O.J.

First, although the issue of race was prominent, it was not as overarching as major media suggested. Polls showed that African Americans found it easier to believe that a white police detective could have planted evidence to frame a black suspect. Doubtless, their opinion reflects years of unfair treatment at the hands of the justice system. Similarly, 78 percent of blacks surveyed, compared with 42 percent of whites, agreed with the criminal trial verdict, while only 26 percent of blacks, compared with 74 percent of whites, agreed with the civil trial verdict. A nearly all-black jury acquitted O.J. in the criminal trial, and a nearly all-white jury found him liable in the civil trial. Of course, new evidence was presented and the so-called race card was not played in the civil trial. But, there is troubling irony in the verdicts. That irony resounds in public reaction to the trials. When Simpson was acquitted in October 1995, blacks responded with jubilation and whites with outrage. In contrast, some whites felt vindicated by the civil trial ruling, while most blacks were oddly silent. Perhaps, blacks became bored with the civil trial proceedings. Or maybe we just weren't buying the media's line that the trial was a referendum on race.

After all, Simpson is not just an African-American man. He is (or should we say was?) a very rich man. And for a while, his wealth seemed to transcend his race as he led a charmed life, moving with ease through corporate boardrooms and tony country clubs. Though he is now virtually a persona non grata in those exclusive circles, he is by no means just another black man. For what it's worth, he still has his celebrity and, some say, a wad of cash in foreign bank accounts. As the jury's more than \$32 million damage award suggests, the civil trial was about money. For that matter, so was the criminal trial. If O.J. had been an ordinary black man, he would have faced the criminal charges without the benefit of representation by a high-priced legal dream team. And he would be serving a life sentence or facing the death penalty, now. So, the criminal trial was not really about race either.

What both trials taught us, however, was about race. Referring to polls showing that opinions about Simpson's guilt or innocence are racially split, President Clinton noted, "In terms of the way Americans see the world differently, generally, based on their race, that troubles me. I think the only answer to that is for us to spend more time listening to each other and try to put ourselves in each other's shoes and understand why we see the world in different ways and keep trying to overcome that. We always need to be working on how to bridge these divides between us."

As for the O.J. Simpson affair, Clinton said, "It's over as far as I'm concerned. We need to get on to other things."

We second that emotion.

### Here's to Black Love

Is red the color of love? In our eyes, it's black, and it speaks to the heart.

"Love is like a baby. It needs to be treated gently."

— Congo proverb

"To love is to make of one's heart a swinging door."

— Howard Thurman

"Love stretches your heart and makes you big inside."

— Margaret Walker

"We love you madly."

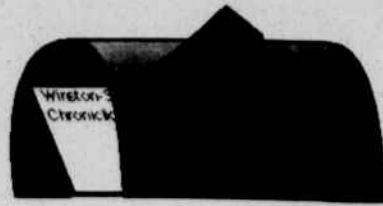
— Duke Ellington

"Love as deeply as if it were forever."

— Audre Lorde

"We have always loved each other, children; pass it on."

— Lucille Clifton



## The Chronicle Mailbag

### Our Readers Speak Out

## Are Denise Brown, Tammy Bruce Seeking Foundation Funds to Recall Judge Who Granted O.J. Simpson Child Custody?

As the Women's Progress Alliance seeks to recall an Orange County judge who granted O.J. Simpson custody of his two youngest children, the group, headed by activist Tammy Bruce and Simpson former sister-in-law, Denise Brown, is seeking \$200,000 from Texaco Foundation possibly to perform this and other tasks, mainly in the black South Central Los Angeles community to promote "social action on violence against women and children."

Instead of returning a reporter's calls last week, Bruce,

reporter, who was seeking clarification, to back off the story.

According to the proposal, obtained by this reporter, the \$200,000 "would provide start-up funds, operating costs and expansion" for what will be called the South Central Alliance. Yet the Women's Project Alliance, the parent group, is simultaneously raising funds to conduct a recall against Orange County Superior Court Judge Nancy Weiben Stock. There has been no explanation as to how safeguards will be implemented to assure there will be no co-

operation, which raised money by selling angel pins and seeking donations from such notables as talk show host Geraldo Rivera. Much of the money raised remains unaccounted for, according to published reports.

Last November, top leaders within the civil rights movement, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson, of People United to Save Humanity (PUSH); Kwesi Mfume, executive director of the National NAACP; and Celes King III, state chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality of California, worked tirelessly to help resolve a class action discrimination suit filed against Texaco by its 4,000-plus black employees. The suit was settled for just under \$200 million. Part of the settlement is earmarked for charitable work in the black community via the Texaco Foundation.

Brown, Bruce and a group that is "men and women, gay and straight, Republican and Democrat and is ethnically

diverse, "intends to work with three predominantly black-run social service organizations: the Creative Neighbors Always Sharing House, the Family Helpline and the Continental Healthcare Alliance.

The Creative NAS House is a nonprofit shelter for women and children fleeing domestic violence and/or struggling with substance abuse.

Family Helpline is another nonprofit shelter for women and children fleeing domestic violence and/or struggling with substance abuse.

Family Helpline is another nonprofit entity that assists people with gang problems, substance abuse, a lack of housing and crisis intervention.

The Continental Healthcare Alliance is an independent physicians' association committed to offering quality medical care to minorities in South Central Los Angeles. The physicians provide free medical treatment to indigent patients on Saturdays.

## GUEST COLUMN

By DENNIS SCHATZMAN

former president of the Los Angeles Chapter of the National Organization of Women, called black leaders sympathetic to their causes to try to get the

mingling of funds or activities.

As has been reported during the Simpson criminal trial, Denise Brown was involved in a foundation named after her slain

## The Cherry Hill Community Club: A Tribute to Mazie

Her time, the only ingredient in life, was spent wisely while on this planet.

Her many accomplishments and deeds of love can never be measured, nor forgotten.

In 1987 she organized the Cherry Hill Community Neighborhood Association. She was our only president from day one, for which we, the members, were grateful. We were grateful for her devotion and compassion and leadership. We will truly miss her presence.

There are many things we cannot understand. How the sun rises in the east and makes its way across the western horizon to go down at evening tide behind the

western hill. We cannot understand how in its season, a flower springs up, blooms, withers and dies. Neither can we understand why Mrs. Woodruff, neither young nor old, had to be taken from our midst. We must not wonder about her. God works

that is told

Or like the petals of a rose unfolds.

We cannot unfold a rose bud.

A flower of God's design.

How can we have wisdom to unfold the life of Woodruff?

The pathway that lies before us

Our heavenly Father Knows.

So, let's trust Him to unfold each memory

Just as he does the rose,

And as we think back in life,

Along the paths we've trod

We will cherish the times we spent with her.

And leave the rest to God.

## GUEST COLUMN

By RUTH H. HARRISON

the wonder.

Her life here on earth is like a story

## Black Men Floating — or Black Men Voting

It's not often that two identical numbers have meanings which can affect society in starkly opposite ways. But I've come across two such numbers in the past week: Both refer to 1.5 million African-American men.

These numbers describe two situations — the one, a pledge made good to be celebrated and encouraged; the other, a challenge to be faced and overcome.

The statistic which offers us the bright promise of what is and can be is that about 1.5 million more black males — one in seven African-American men — voted in November's presidential election than had voted in the 1992 presidential contest.

The statistic which presents us with a frightening challenge comes from the latest report of the Sentencing Project, a nonprofit organization that champions alternatives to prison sentences, particularly for crimes not involving violence. One of the report's findings was that nearly 1.5 million black men — again, one in every seven African-American males — are currently or permanently barred from voting because they are in prison or have been convicted of a felony.

Thus, set side by side, the two statistics of 1.5 million black men and the situations they describe represent in startling fashion the difficulties black America has always struggled with on the one hand, and the advances it has made on the other, along the color line. And they illuminate with great clarity the choice facing both African Americans and the larger American society here at the beginning of the 21st century.

Shall black America and America continue to produce a sizable pool of black men — prison and jail inmates and offenders — "floating" on the surface of the society like so much flotsam and jetsam, not merely unwilling, but in significant measure, unable to put down the roots that would provide a stable life for

themselves and their families?

Or shall black America and America produce an ever-expanding cohort of black men who are anchored by having been equipped with the education and training that enables them to secure work at decent wages — and are imbued with solid moral precepts and a sense of civic responsibility?

The surge in black male voting was in stark contrast to how Americans as a whole responded to the election: Just under 49 percent of the total number of eligible voters actually voted — the lowest rate of electoral participation in a pres-

ity organizations and individuals within black America — and within the larger society as well — must encourage and support if America is to pull back from creating a prison system that is characterized by astonishing racial disparities.

That we are significantly on the way to that is captured in a wealth of data in the Sentencing Project study. The study also found that blacks are now incarcerated at a rate 7.5 times that of whites, and that 51 percent of all state and federal prisoners are African-American; 33 percent are white, and 15 percent are Latino-American.

Make no mistake about it. I believe that those who commit crimes should be punished. But as the Sentencing Project suggests, there are viable alternatives to incarceration for non-violent property or

drug offenses which punish wrongdoers while offering them a chance to improve their own lives and improve the stability of the families and their neighborhoods.

We must stop pretending that locking up the vast majority of those who commit crimes, especially those who commit property crimes and drug offenses, is going to solve America's "crime problem" to any significant degree.

Instead, as an alternative, we should examine with great vigor how we can reconcile those two 1.5 million groups within black America — that is, how we can enable those 1.5 million black men who are floating to turn their lives around and expand that new pool of 1.5 million black men who are voting.

(Hugh B. Price is President of the National Urban League.)

## TO BE EQUAL

By HUGH B. PRICE



identical election in 72 years. Latino Americans, who, spurred by the widespread anti-immigration rhetoric of recent years, went to the polls in record numbers, were the only other group of voters to increase their voting (the total vote of African-American women declined slightly).

As yet, no formal analyses of the causes of that voting surge of black males have been done.

But such analysts as David Bositis, of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, and Prof. Lorenzo Moriss, of Howard University, speculate that at least some of it is due to the Million Man March of October 1995. They point out that, for all the controversy the March caused in some quarters, it did emphasize the importance of black men becoming involved in their communities and in the political process.

That is the kind of thinking and activ-