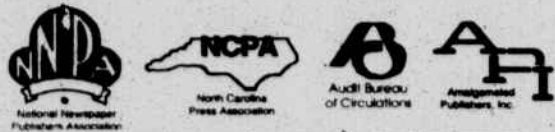


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Lowery Leaves Spiritual Legacy

As the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) meets this week in Atlanta, it bids farewell to a veteran civil rights leader. The Rev. Joseph Lowery, SCLC president for two decades, retires this fall. In 1955, he helped mount the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1957, Lowery joined the Revs. Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth and others in co-founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Prior to heading the SCLC, Lowery served as the organization's vice president and board chairman. Heading one of the nation's leading grass roots groups, however, is no desk job. Over the years, Lowery has been on the front lines of the struggle for equality. He's marched on Southern roads, forced open doors in corporate America, rallied for environmental justice, waged selective purchasing campaigns, registered voters, been jailed during nonviolent protests and suffered beatings at the hands of police and white supremacists. He's fought both apartheid and the affirmative action backlash.

Among the civil rights movement's old guard, Lowery is a soul survivor. He believes liberation theology is inseparable from the ministry. Civil and human rights have been his lifelong mission. A Southern preacher, he sees the role of minister as advocate, interpreter and servant. As SCLC president, he restored the organization's financial stability, embraced more mainstream policies and tackled economic and international issues. Recently, he helped raise funds to rebuild burned black churches.

Born in 1924 in Huntsville, Ala., he pastored Central Church, Atlanta's oldest and largest United Methodist church, from 1968 to 1986. Under his leadership, the church gained 2,000 new members and erected a 240-unit, low-to-moderate-income housing complex.

Reflecting on a 40-year career in civil rights, Lowery attests to changes — not all for the better. The growth of the black middle class, for example, has been accompanied by a rise in black poverty and joblessness. Blacks have the vote, but AIDS, drugs and black-on-black crime are devastating the community. And the fires of racial hatred are smoldering.

The nation's moral decline is in part blame, Lowery says. "We are worshipping the material over the spiritual. That is why we are killing each other. People are expendable, as long as the goal is money."

If the freedom song "We Shall Overcome" doesn't quite ring true, keep the faith. Joe Lowery's legacy should inspire the SCLC for years to come.

Taking the NAACP to Task

NAACP board members and delegates had barely packed their bags to leave the convention in Pittsburgh when black pundits began blasting the nation's premier civil rights group.

The "Afro-American's" Wiley Hall — appalled that boxing promoter Don King received the association's president's award — dubbed the NAACP "the National Association for the Advancement of Celebrity People."

The New York Times' Bob Herbert charged that the organization completely ignored the crucial issue of absent fathers. This despite the convention's supposed focus on children.

Kweisi Mfume himself, the group's president and CEO, implied that some chapters were little more than social clubs and challenged all chapters to activism. Posing a rhetorical question, he asked when individual chapters last staged demonstrations.

Melvin "Skip" Alston, president of the NAACP's North Carolina State Conference, answered with his feet. He and other NAACP representatives lobbied the North Carolina general assembly for welfare reform, funding for historically black colleges and universities, and economic development funds for needy areas.

The state chapter also participated in a rally to press Davidson County to observe the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

It will take more than that, however, if the NAACP intends to stay in the vanguard. Like the national group, which appointed Jamal Bryant, a dynamic young minister, as youth director, the state conference seeks to recruit youth members. Hopefully, new blood will reinvigorate the rights group.

Further, the recent establishment of an endowment will make the NAACP less beholden to corporate donors.

Finally, the organization should need the constructive criticism of columnists Hall and Herbert. As Hall suggested, Don King did not deserve recognition by the NAACP. That award, presented despite King's dubious business practices, harked back to a similar honor given Frank Sinatra when his image was tarnished. No matter how hungry or destitute, black organizations can ill afford to squander their good names. Let thugs go elsewhere for redemption.

As Herbert indicated, absent fathers are one of the most serious crises facing the community. Studies show that children who grow up in female-headed households are more likely to be poor, drop out of school, use drugs, have children out of wedlock, be unemployed and commit crimes. Enough said?

Now that Mfume has retired the NAACP's multimillion-dollar debt, let's hope that state conferences and local chapters will take the ball and run with it. The unfinished business of equality demands that the NAACP stay in the game.



The Chronicle welcomes letters as well as guest columns from its readers. Letters should be as concise as possible and should be typed or legibly printed. To ensure the authenticity of the letter, you must include the name, address and telephone number of the writer. Columns must follow the same guidelines and will be published if they are of interest to our general readership. The Chronicle will not publish any letters or columns that arrive without this information. We reserve the right to edit letters and columns for brevity and clarity. Submit letters and columns to: Chronicle Mailbag, P.O. Box 1636, Winston-Salem, NC 27102.

Apology Would be Valuable

To the Editor:

This letter is written in response to John Gates' editorial piece of July 6 in the Winston-Salem Journal regarding the question of whether the United States should apologize to African-Americans for the incidence of slavery. He raised the question whether an apology would be "empty and serve any useful purpose or just reopen old wounds." I have watched with sad eyes, the brazen neo-conservatism and the flagrant iron-fisted tone of arrogance that permeate the editorial page of that news organ. What else could be expected from such a crew?

As a recent émigré who has returned to the place where I was born following my diaspora from segregated toilets, schools, churches, restaurants, hospitals, and yes, even graveyards in the fifties, I don't need to go as far back as slavery to accept any apology. Today, I frequently bump into some of the still-living characters who perpetrated this evilness. They don't display an ounce of repentance for their impertinence



and disregard for human dignity. Gates' "why apologize" question does raise several interesting observations. First, to apologize implies that a "wrong" has been committed and in order to correct that "wrong" there must be an ensuing acceptance by the perpetrators that they have indeed committed such a wrong. The banner of brazenness which the Journal heralds does not imply that such a wrong was committed — therefore, no apology is necessary. Secondly, to apologize is the same as asking for forgiveness, which translates into redemption as taught each Sunday in our Bible-toting community. To forgive is to repent — a derivative of the Latin *paenitere*, which means to give penance — upon which the idea of redemption is built. To redeem is to be made "whole," which is equivalent to atonement (at-one-ment). Certainly, we Bible-toters are familiar with this word. Most importantly, to forgive is to imply that you will not repeat the wrong in the future, otherwise it is an empty apology. Thanks to the "emptiness" factor portrayed in Gates' question — does the U.S. refusal to apologize imply that this country is unwilling to state that it will not repeat this wrong? Additionally, to forgive requires one to take a proactive posture — to turn the word around and "give-for" goodness, righteousness, etc. Are we as Bible-toters willing to do just that? Lastly, the question of reparations scares the hell out of most people's pocketbooks. Let's just say, it didn't cost anyone a penny to make men whole when I recently visited a white man I knew as a boy — we grew up together in Old Salem. After a long session of reminiscing about old Southside Park and the Pond Giants, he said to me, "Now I want to apologize to you, and I hope you won't be mad at me if I slipped and called you a nigger." I replied, "Not if you don't mind if I slipped and called you a redneck." We both laughed, and the apology was accepted.

English Bradshaw, Ph.D.
Winston-Salem



Voices From the Community

How much do you worry about terrorism?

By COURTNEY DANIEL and BRIDGET EVARTS

About 200 people gathered at Centennial Park in Atlanta this week to honor Alice Hawthorne, victim of the bombing at the 1996 Summer Olympics. Hawthorne, an African-American wife and mother from Georgia, died from wounds suffered in the pipe bomb blast.

The bombings at Centennial Park and the Oklahoma Federal Building have made Americans more aware of the threat of domestic terrorism, while the 1993 blast at the World Trade Center imported foreign terrorism to our doorstep.

The U.S. may have to relinquish its perception of impenetrable borders, and face the threat from within. Americans may have

lost a certain peace of mind, long absent in most Middle Eastern and European countries. Still, many African-Americans have concerns on their minds more pressing than terrorism. And most people don't consider themselves targets of terrorists. On the anniversary of the Olympic bombing, we asked people how much they worry about domestic or foreign terrorism.



"Really, I don't think about it that much."

— Monica Mumford



"It hasn't affected me personally, so I guess I don't think about it all that much."

— Kenya Evans



"There are a lot of people who don't like what the government has done, but they shouldn't respond with violent behavior."

— Vernon Carter



"To tell you the truth, I really don't think about it."

— Tammy Cuthrell