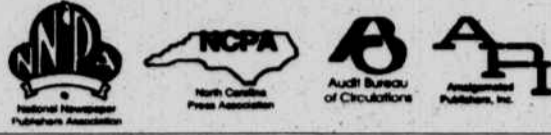


OPINION

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.

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Charter Schools: Black Colleges' Last Hope?

Most North Carolinians were surprised to hear that North Carolina Central University had missed its projected enrollment goal by almost 20 percent or close to 1,000 students. "How could that be?" exclaimed the Central Alumni and other boosters of the venerable college. Something is very wrong here. Central's problems should send shivers down the spines of all supporters of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

The problem for Central or any other school with that kind of shortfall in enrollment is that faculty positions are based on Full Time Equivalency (FTE) or the number of full-time students and the number of part time students whose load, when added together, equals a full time equivalent. When FTE drops permanently, faculty positions decrease and untenured faculty are let go. The untenured faculty is where much of the institutions' verve comes from. They are the ones who gently move the institution forward. Without the younger faculty, the institution loses much of its creativity and energy.

Thus declining enrollment begets faculty cuts which beget creativity deficits, which beget lower enrollment and so on into an unrecoverable downward spiral.

What happened to the students? Let me put forth a testable hypothesis. That hypothesis is that the failure of North Carolina's public schools to adequately prepare young black boys is severely impacting the number of black men ready for college level work. In 1995, the public schools achieved the performance level statewide of more than 73 percent of the black male 5th-graders failing one or both of the end-of-course tests. If three or four black boys are crushed in 5th grade, how many do you suppose will be going to college? Racial quotas for college admissions are gasping their last breath. Unless the primary and secondary system of education is changed quickly, the only HBCU left in North Carolina will be



Bennett College (an all-girls school).

What does this have to do

with charter schools? Everything. North Carolina enacted charter school legislation last year authorizing the State Board of Education to approve up to 100 charter schools. Charter schools are accountable public schools; accountable to the customer (the parent) for customer satisfaction and accountable to the taxpayers for student performance. Public school districts whose schools fail keep right on operating, hurting kids and denying black colleges future students. Charter schools that fail are shut down.



Guest Column Vernon Robinson

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of potential college students but consulting revenue for the faculty now.

All HBCUs save women's colleges need large numbers of black male students to thrive. Indeed, if the public schools of North Carolina continue to turn out thousands of Peter Pans each year, boys who will never grow up to be men and have the skills to support their families, our community will not survive. People begging the public school districts to improve without forcing them to do so remind me of the beggar in the third Chapter of Acts. My charge to them is the same as Peter to that beggar.

"Silver and gold have I none, but such that I have I offer thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up (HBCUs) and walk. We have the greatest concentration of teaching talent in any middle class on the planet. We have a charter bill that specifically gives N.C. black colleges powers that no other HBCUs have in the country. All we need is the faith and will to stand up and walk."

(Vernon Robinson is the president of the North Carolina Education Reform Foundation.)

Using King's Name in Vain

In September 1830, the first National Negro Convention met at Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia. The Rev. Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, presided. The meeting had a noble purpose: "to devise ways and means for bettering of our condition." Discussion focused on fighting oppression and promoting universal education.

Last week the National Baptist Convention USA (NBC) met in Denver. In spirit and in truth, the meeting was a far cry from the historic 1830 convention. Indeed, the Baptist group's agenda was dominated by controversy surrounding its president, the Rev. Henry Lyons. Earlier this year, Lyons' wife allegedly set fires in a mansion he owns with another woman, the denomination's public relations director, Bernice Edwards, a convicted embezzler.

In the aftermath of that incident, Lyons said the \$750,000 estate serves as an embassy of sorts to host foreign dignitaries. Many pastors were outraged, not just about Lyons' moral indiscretions, but because they knew nothing of the lavish residence.

The organization's old guard, however, closed ranks around their embattled leader. The convention's board found no wrongdoing on Lyons' part but vowed to tighten the financial reins. Convention delegates also gave Lyons a vote of confidence. His future, then, would seem secure as the leader of the nation's largest black religious group.

Some younger clergy, however, are not pleased with the decision of the majority.

Lyons campaigned for the presidency of the group on a reform platform, promising to restore Martin Luther King Jr.'s brand of activism and to mobilize member congregations. He has since broken his campaign promise and made a mockery of the organization he heads.

How dare he invoke King's name! By using King's name in vain, Lyons compromises the moral authority of the civil rights movement. The retention of Lyons at the helm of the National Baptist Convention is a low-down, dirty shame. He does not deserve to be forgiven; he deserves to be fired. Maybe his wife, now facing arson charges, is up to that challenge.

Why Diana Mattered

She was the undisputed queen of the tabloids, who aspired to and finally succeeded in becoming Britain's queen of hearts. Britons of all races and nationalities lined the streets to bid farewell to Diana, Princess of Wales. The emotional outpouring after her sudden death hearkens back to the collective mourning set off by President John F. Kennedy's 1963 assassination and funeral.

Satellite technology transmitted the princess's funeral to an audience of 2.5 billion worldwide. Princess Diana captivated the world even more in death than she did in life. Her tragic demise brings to the fore the lessons to be gleaned from her all-too-short life. The world knew the princess of Wales as a symbol of glamour and privilege, a young woman who dared to buck royal tradition and touched countless lives. Before she was a revered royal, however, she was a country girl who taught kindergarten. She may have divorced her privacy to marry fame, but she retained the compassionate heart of a kindergarten teacher.

As Robert Fulghum suggested in his bestselling book, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," kindergarten teachers have a wealth of wisdom to impart. A minister-turned-author, Fulghum suggests that the simple lessons learned in the sandbox apply to grownups' lives as well.

Here are a few lessons Fulghum says kindergarten teachers show and tell their young charges.

"Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life — learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some. Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant does up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that. Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup — they all die. So do we. And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned — the biggest word of all — LOOK."

These concepts were not lost on Princess Diana. Through example, she strove to pass these lessons on to her children. Her incredible show of affection in the streets of London and around the globe suggests that the sweet, media-savvy princess taught the world, as well.

Her premature death and charmed yet troubled life also conveyed some tough lessons. All that glitters is not gold. And there is no happily ever after.

Muhammad's Conversion Should Have Been Questioned

Having seen the Bible used as a license to justify and carry out personal agendas for years in the past, I really should not be surprised to see it happen today. It seems as if every time truth demands that one explain his or her actions, the Bible is used as a magic wand to transform unjust acts into just ones.

This act can be seen in the so-called conversion of Benjamin Muhammad (formerly Benjamin Chavis). While I respect Muhammad's courage and effort to bring about a degree of equity to the black community, I do find his conversion somewhat suspect.

After serving the Christian church exceptionally well for 30 years, Muhammad declares that the same God who called him to the church, called him to the mosque. He rationalized this action with the scripture "With God, all things are possible." While one must agree that all things are possible with God, we must confess that there is one thing that is impossible with God: inconsis-

teny. Let's think about it. The God of the Christian church teaches that God is a spirit, The Nation of Islam, however, teaches that God is a man ("Message to the Blackman"

because it has poisoned the minds of so-called Negroes so much that they cannot agree with each other ("Message to the Blackman" p.94)

In my mind, and in the black community, all of this inconsistency should have brought forth a legitimate question: How can God direct a man to teach one doctrine for 30 years, have him stop and begin teaching another doctrine that is totally against the first doctrine? Is God changing with the times also? I will not attempt to answer the question above; I believe Mr. Muhammad has the exclusive responsibility to answer it. Neither will I say that one is wrong to support this Day of Absence that is forthcoming. I do believe that the black community should begin to take the responsibility of questioning the actions of all leaders. Moreover, black leaders should take on the responsibility of answering legitimate questions from the black community.

Guest Column Kwame Nyerere

p.6). Also, the Christian church teaches that God came in the person of Jesus Christ, The Nation of Islam declares that God came in the person of one Master Fard Muhammad on July 4, 1930. Additionally, they teach that Elijah Muhammad is the Christ, the long sought after Messiah. The Christian church considers the Bible the word of God. The Nation of Islam teaches that God himself refers to the Bible as the "Poison Book,"

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(Kwame Nyerere is a community activist.)