

# OPINION

## THE CHRONICLE

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### Tradin' the mule for a John Deere

For the most part, black farmers haven't asked for much.

For years, an adequate balance of rain, sun and wind have been just about enough to ensure the survival of thousands of small and large black farms.

Now, however, with the advent of farming technology, rain and sun don't matter as much.

New fertilizer, growth agents and supplements have taken some of the worry out of farming. And new mega-farms systems, with multiple crops, highly effective crop rotations and irrigation systems have replaced small one-crop farms - the essence of black farming.

But for black farmers, technology has been as much a source of contention as it has been an aid.

They've found that as farming has gone high tech, it's also gone high dollar. And when you're dealing with small crop yields, money simply doesn't grow on trees.

When black farmers did head to banks and to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for help, they were met with stern faces, lost applications and outright refusals.

So now as black farmers struggle to survive, they've begun to ask for help. First they went to the courts to seek redress for years of discrimination.

Then they went to the USDA for an apology and more importantly a financial settlement.

They've also come to black people with a plea - buy black.

It's not much to ask. Next time you head to the farmers market, look for other brown faces from which to buy your beans and corn.

When you're at the supermarket, ask if they have any minority suppliers. If they don't, it's not hard to figure out what to do next. Fire off an angry letter to the store's corporate office or call the nearest complaint line.

For more than 400 years, the soil has been the source of African American pride. Whether we tilled under the horrors of slavery, under the yoke of sharecropping or as small independent land owners we recognized the power of the soil.

We tilled because it was the only way we knew to get ahead.

We don't have to till anymore but it is our responsibility to keep alive our longest standing tradition.

Black farmers are not asking much - a little rain; a little sun; a little help from the rest of us.

To the Editor:

The writer is a retired district court judge.

Every year when Legislature is in session, proposals are made to do away with the election of judges and to substitute an appointive system.

At one time the reason given was that very few voters knew who the judicial candidates were; now the additional reason given is that it costs too much money for judicial candidates to run for office.

The proposed appointment method would create a worse problem. Voters would lose their right to choose judges and the process would be turned over to the Governor and the Legislature for "merit selection."

The suggestion may sound good in theory. In practice it has never worked. The Governor and the Legislature are politically elected and they think and act political-ly.

Despite its faults, the elective system for judges is the fairest and keeps the electorate involved. Instead of throwing the baby out with the bath water why not institute reforms that address the problems?

One solution could be initiation of a voters' pamphlet, interested candidates would contribute a proportionate share of the cost to pro-



duce and mail to each voter. Each candidate would be given equal space to address the voters.

On the issue of judicial election cost, judges could be required to dis-

close in each case all contributions received from any interested party in that case. This would reduce the number of those eager to contribute to judicial campaigns, would also

reduce the eagerness of some judicial candidates to seek those contributions.

Stephen Franks

### Another view on vouchers

Recently the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that the state could support private religious schools and not be in violation of constitutional language requiring the separation of church and state. Many Catholic, Protestant and other religious schools may benefit from this ruling if it can withstand the scrutiny of the U.S. Supreme Court. But the theme that ought not be lost in this case is the larger battle between vouchers and public education. Vouchers must not be allowed to replace public education. There are some things that should not be turned over to the private sector and education is one of them.

The ostensible motive of many supporters of voucher systems can be found in the words of one of the callers to my radio talk show. In his words, voucher systems are needed to "give poor children the same choices that rich kids have." My response to him was "hog-wash!" Anyone who thinks that the staunch proponents of the voucher system came up with the voucher idea to affect the quality of education for poor children, doesn't have both oars in the water. Wisconsin's voucher system, as with many other states, is a

thinly veiled attempt to subsidize the private school tuition payments of middle and upper-middle class parents.

Any first year public administration student can tell you that for many local governments, the largest revenue item is property taxes and the largest expenditure item is education. So, if middle and upper-middle class Americans are funding public education with their property taxes, but sending their children to private school, it stands to reason that they want their tax dollars to fund the education of their children as well as the children of poorer families. But if that's the case, and I think it is, why don't they come out and say that and stop hiding behind the skirt of "school choice?"

They've concocted this "school choice" position based on the notion that any private school is superior to any public school. This idea is ridiculous at its core. Any school is as good as its teachers, administrators, parents, students and fiscal resources will allow it to be. To assume that freedom from state policies alone will promote a greater learning atmosphere, inspire administrators, make

teachers more caring and nurturing and make parents better tutors and educational partners with their children is, again, hogwash.

What we need in America's public education systems is a com-

whatever the cost.

If the voucher system becomes the law of the land - God forbid - the rich will prosper and the poor will perish. The first tell-tale signs



**Jones Street**  
Val Atkinson

mitment to quality education at any cost; that's right, I said at any cost. For too long the proponents of public schools have not tackled the issue of cost in public education head-on. Some politicians have us trained to believe that anything associated with higher taxes is bad. Sometimes I wish they would apply the same yardstick to the Defense Department, agricultural subsidies, and multi-national corporation advertising funds. If we want a good education system in America that educates ALL of our children it must be under the control of the public sector, and we must be willing to pay for it,

of the prosper/perish dichotomy will be the skewed racial and ethnic enrollment figures. Don't be surprised that minority children - even with state vouchers in hand - find it difficult to enter the premier private schools. The second Tell-Tale sign will be the partial funding of vouchers. This will require a co-payment on the part of poor folks and rich folks alike. The question is who will be able to afford co-payments for their children's primary and secondary education?

VAL ATKINSON is a Triangle Tribune columnist.

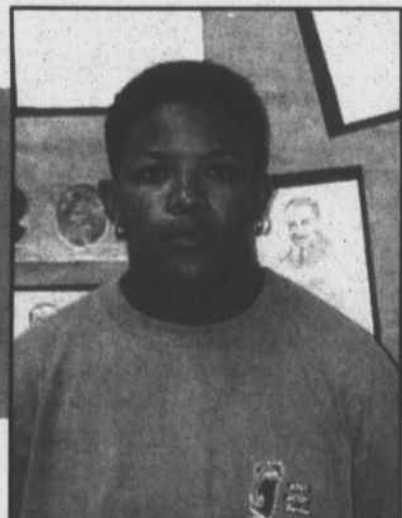
## Voices from the community...

Recently, the W-S/FC School Board has been wrangling over the issue of multiculturalism in education. Do you think there is a need for more African American history in public schools? Why or why not?



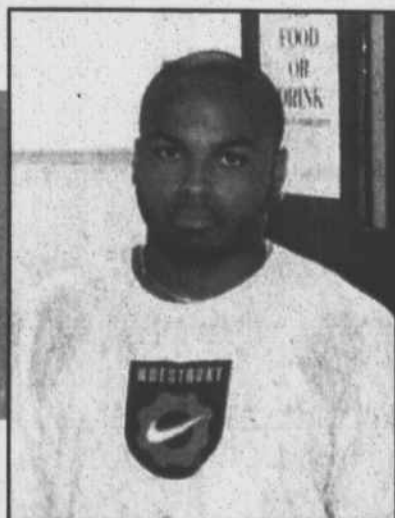
**BRYANT McCORKLE**

The need is a necessity, because right now our kids are failing to learn African American history, the only person they know about is Dr. King. They have to be taught about African Americans at school and they have to be taught at home. The only way we are going to continue our history and pass it on is for our kids to become more educated. Once our kids find out where we came from, we wouldn't have so much violence. We'll start loving each other instead of hating each other, they'll know that all of us are kings and queens from Africa.



**ERICA LEGGETT**

Students around here need to know where they came from and about their ancestors and the things they did so they can look up to them as role models. And maybe try to do some of the things that they did.



**KEITH GREENLEE**

They need to know something about themselves in order to have pride in what they do in the future. If you don't really know anything about your own past you aren't going to be productive in the future.



**DARYL NAPPER**

Kids need to be aware of where they come from and their heritage. They need to know what we represent, and once they know what we represent we will have better kids in the community.



**NICOLE ALLMAN**

There is a crucial need for more African American literature and history because there's so many negative influences such as the media. Sometimes the parents can't teach the children, some kids don't have parents, the school system should enforce the need for African American history.