

OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Taking land from blacks is a part of U.S. history

Barbara Reynolds
 Guest Columnist

In South Africa and in the United States over the past few weeks we saw the loosening of deep-seated agricultural policies that have worked to enhance the wealth of whites, while deepening the poverty of blacks.

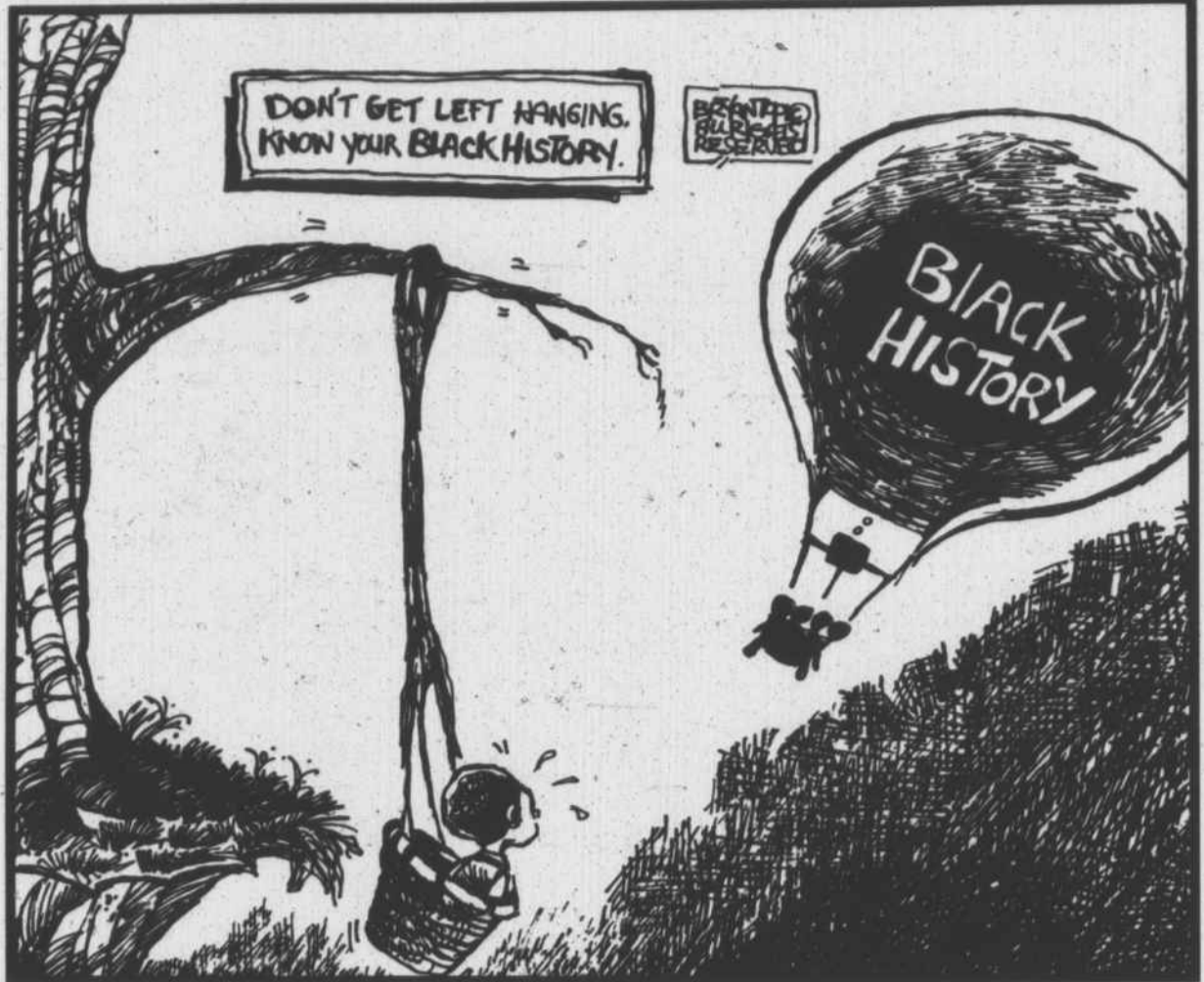
Although officials in pre-apartheid South Africa or post-slavery United States won't call it that, but land-grab reversals shook the dust off of preferential treatment policies for whites that are deeply rooted in the history of both countries.

The U.S. government agreed to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to black farmers who had documented evidence that they — unlike white farmers — were denied government loans, disaster relief and other aid because of their race.

Next, I hope former Agricultural Secretary Mike Espy will sue over the racist policies that forced him out of that Cabinet post. Yes, he was acquitted but he is still out of his position.

These racist policies worked not only to destroy black farmers and wrest land from black hands, but to also ensure that the land stayed in white hands. In other words, the land was set aside for whites based on the long-standing principles of white supremacy on which the United States and South Africa were built.

In the United States, partly because of U.S. government policies, black farmers have lost land at incredible rates. In 1820, 14 percent



of the nation's farms were owned by blacks, according to U.S. Agricultural Department — the USDA — Statistics. By 1992 the number had fallen to below 19,000 or one percent.

"What you are looking at is a policy of genocide being unleashed at the black farmer, which took its toll on the black family and whole communities," said John W. Boyd Jr., a Baskerville, Va. farmer. Boyd Jr. is also president of the National Black Farmers Association, a group founded in 1995 to fight racism in USDA loan programs.

"There were hundreds of cases where the inability of black farmers to get the kind of aid whites did forced them into bankruptcy. Then if they owed \$100,000 for example, the note was reduced to \$30,000 and

sold to a white farmer," he said.

The department's policies are rooted in U.S. history, where black labor and land were exploited to increase white wealth. Initially, black slaves were one of the greatest sources of white wealth.

In 1860, shortly before the Emancipation Proclamation, black slaves constituted a \$7 billion capital investment. That was bigger than all other private investments and the federal budget.

There were many land giveaway programs that were denied to blacks. For example, the Homestead Act — enacted on the eve of the Civil War and enforced until 1900 — provided about 600,000 families with homes and farms. Blacks were unable to acquire any of it. When they showed

interest their lives were threatened, according to Claud Anderson in his book "Black Labor, White Wealth." These farms became the basis of huge amounts of inherited wealth, which blacks could work on, but not own.

In 1866, President Andrew Johnson vetoed a congressional bill that would have given black slaves a mere "40 acres and a mule" as compensation for 250 years of bondage.

This slap in the face left thousands of blacks penniless, defenseless and landless after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Barbara Reynolds is a columnist for the National Newspaper Publishers' Association.

Keeping Black History Alive

Every February, we salute African-American luminaries, recall the trials, tragedies and triumphs of our American saga, and beat the drum for our African heritage.

This history bears repeating, but some just as compelling stories never get told. Living among us are ordinary people who breathe life into African-American folk traditions.

Sara Murphy of rural Robeson County is a healer. Some call her a root worker, some a spiritual adviser. People travel from miles around, sometimes on chartered buses, for her cures and advice. In warm weather, Ms. Murphy digs roots and gathers herbs for the secret concoction she makes in batches and puts up in Mason jars.

She claims that one swallow of the potion three times a day will cure most illnesses and remove spells. Ms. Murphy, who also tells the future, insists that she uses her gift only to heal, not to hex. One female client received sassafras roots to chew on, a lucky red bag filled with coins and predictions of her future. Another client explained, "Whole lotta ailments a regular doctor can't cure."

If Ms. Murphy's potion doesn't cure what ails you, Joe Thompson's fiddling will.

Mr. Thompson, who lives in Alamance County, can't read music and plays by ear.

He began playing the fiddle at age six. Soon after, he was performing with his father at Saturday night square dances. Though interest in the music waned in the 1940s, Mr. Thompson kept playing at home, during tobacco curing time and for family reunions. In the 1970s, he was "discovered" by folklorists and started performing publicly again. The nation's last living African-American traditional fiddler, Mr. Thompson mixes his songs with stories of rural life.

Buckdancers Algia Mae Hinton and John Dee Holeman are as fast on their feet as Mr. Thompson is with his fingers.

Both are also blues guitarists. Mr. Holeman, who lives in Durham, shows off buckdancing when he takes a break from playing. Ms. Hinton, who lives in Johnston County, can do a buckdance while playing a guitar behind her head, never missing a step or note.

Woodcarver George SerVance of Thomasville, lets his dolls do the dancing. He was 10 years old when he first saw a man carving a dancing doll in the local five-and-dime store.

"Nobody ever showed me how to carve," he said. "The Lord just gave it to me."

In his basement workshop, Mr. SerVance carves walking sticks, Biblical figures and dancing dolls of Uncle Sam, the royal guard, clowns and other characters. His work is displayed in the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh.

In High Point, quilter Bunice Hope expresses her artistry with needle and thread. She finds inspiration for her quilts in stained glass windows, flags and flowers.

She has even crafted a Martin Luther King Jr. quilt.

Unlike Dr. King, these plain folks will never be famous or change the world.

They contribute in another way.

They keep history alive.

Education could be big loser with current lottery bill

Val Atkinson
 Jones Street



State Senate Bill 21 was written by Sen. Tony Rand, D-Robeson, and co-sponsored by Sens. Frank Balance, D-Warrenton; Charlie Smith Dannelly, D-Mecklenburg; Howard Lee, D-Orange; Bill Martin, D-Guilford; Aaron Plyler, D-Richmond; R.C. Soles, D-New Hanover and David Weinstein, D-Cumberland.

After my initial reading of the bill I thought the clerk had mislabeled it. It should be called the Clean Water Bill instead of the State Lottery Bill.

I don't have anything against clean water, we all should drink more of it. But I'd like to see education get the lion's share of any lottery proceeds in North Carolina. After all, that's where most supporters of a state lottery think the proceeds are going. But Senate Bill 21 — as it's currently written — would return 50 per-

cent of lottery revenues to winners in the form of prize money sixteen percent is earmarked for administration, and a whopping 20 percent would go to the "Clean Water Revolving Loan and Grant Fund."

The remaining 14 percent would be divided between technology, capital improvements and scholarships.

This division could leave the scholarship fund with as little as 5 percent of total revenues. I don't think that's what lottery supporters have in mind when they talk about an "Educational" lottery.

I'd like to see the bill give scholarships a larger portion of the net revenues.

Another change I'd like to see is some financial aid to students with less than a "B" average, but with validated financial needs. Senate Bill 21 would only give scholarships to students with "A" or "B" averages. There are always a huge number of North Carolina high school graduates with "C" averages who need financial help more than those with "A" or "B" averages.

Across the country there is a positive correlation between high family income and high grade point aver-

ages. In many cases children with high grade point averages are the children of wealthy families who've paid for the best education they could buy for their children because they could afford it. To the bill's credit, there is a semblance of means testing in that there is a \$150,000 threshold that families must qualify under. Even so, the Senate would be wise to ensure that the lottery doesn't become a direct transfer program of poor folks dollars to well heeled financially stable families. Another change to consider would be the expansion of funding or stipends to private institutions of higher education. The current bill calls for \$2,500 to be granted to qualified students to attend private schools in North Carolina.

That's a drop in the bucket for private school tuition. And finally, the bill needs to ensure that small businesses — especially businesses owned by minorities — have a fair chance at landing a lottery franchise, or "retail outlet" as it is referred to in the bill. According to the lottery data collected by states with similar demographics to our own, we can

expect minorities to play the lottery at a higher rate than the majority population. This ought to mean that minorities have a fair share of retail outlets and that minority students have a fair opportunity to benefit from the net proceeds of the lottery.

Senate Bill 21 has a long way to go before it becomes law and there will be a number of opportunities to ensure that minorities get a fair shake. Senators Balance, Dannelly, Martin and Lee will, I'm sure, see that the bill is just and fair.

As for the House, well, this is an opportunity to facilitate healing from "The Deal."

The lottery bill will provide an opportunity for the Legislative Black Caucus, House Democrats and cooperative Republicans to work together for the benefit of all North Carolinians.

Now that it we know who the Speaker will be for the next two years and who his key committee heads are, it's time to focus on the real business of the legislature — the people's business.

Val Atkinson is a columnist for the Triangle Tribune

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY...

A number of Republican candidates have already formed presidential exploratory committees. A former vice president, a millionaire publisher and a conservative Christian are all expected to seek the Republican Party's nomination for president. We asked local African-Americans — who traditionally vote Democratic — whether they would cast their ballots for a Republican.



Lamon Williams



Jason Abraham



Sheneika Smith



Barry Harris



Farrah Fryar

"Even though Clinton is caught up in some stuff right now, he did more than George Bush did. And he's still trying to do things even though he's been in a scandal for the last year."

"I think I would because I believe in voting for the person and not the group. And if they shared the same views that I do then I probably would vote for a Republican."

"I would vote for a Republican if they have the qualities I look for in a president. It doesn't matter if he's a Democrat or a Republican as long as they are looking out for minorities, health care and education. As long as they have those types of qualities, I would vote for them."

"I can't say I would because their beliefs are different from mine. I'm strong-minded and their rules are too different from those of the Democrats."

"Probably not. Because their background as far as I have ever known have not been the same as mine. I usually side with the Democrats, but if their issues or topics are similar to mine I might consider it."