

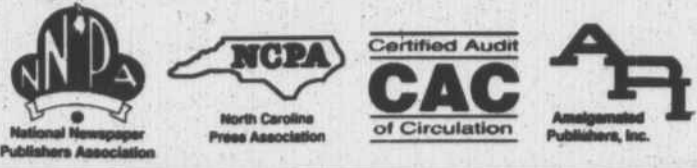
# OPINION

## Letters to the Editor:

# THE CHRONICLE

The Choice for African American News and Information

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### We stand corrected

We stand corrected. Years after completing kindergarten, we have learned that the very first thing our teacher taught us is a lie.

Yes Virginia, there is such a thing as a stupid question - especially if you're dealing with the Winston-Salem Police Department and race relations.

Since finding out that Brian Barker, the Forsyth County sheriff's deputy who shot himself and blamed the act on "Hispanics" in a Chevrolet Impala, the minority community has been buzzing. The main topic of conversation is how quickly law enforcement officials can launch a wide scale man hunt for minority suspects with little or no description.

Would the reaction be the same if the perpetrator was described simply as a white man, people asked themselves and The Chronicle repeatedly over the last week.

When The Chronicle finally did ask that question of the Winston-Salem Police Department the answer was shocking.

According to Lt. Fred Jones there is such a thing as a bad question - if it's about race and the force.

When asked point blank about the police's reaction to minority suspects, Jones replied, "That's a stupid question."

When asked if the department would change any of its procedures as a result of the case, because of the attention it gained and the negative

affects it had on the minority community, Jones responded with an abrupt "no."

Though he did call the next day to apologize and explain the department's policy, the damage had already been done.

Several local residents had already reported being pulled over at gun point by officers looking for a subject with no description - save an ethnic group with members as diverse as the rainbow.

And already, many people of color once again have begun to question the motives and policies of the police department.

If teachers have a mantra, it's probably "there's no such thing as a stupid question."

And most taxpayers and The Chronicle feel that it should be the same mantra that drives the police force.

Asking those tough questions is the only way things are going to get better. It forces law enforcement officials to think about how the community perceives them. It is the only way to begin to heal the community's racial divide.

Evidently, the force has a long way to go before that truly happens. And in the meantime, people of color will become more and more wary of the intentions of law enforcement officers.

Yes Virginia, there is such a thing as a stupid question. Your kindergarten teacher lied

### East Winston deserves a high tech high school

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School Board is likely to go forward with a \$200 million bond referendum request sometime in the year 2000. Most of the money will go toward new elementary, middle and high schools.

None of the proposed schools, however, are currently slated to be located in the traditional African American community.

What a travesty.

The school board has a peculiar way of addressing the critical needs of the black community - they just ignore them. If keeping our schools integrated is one of the goals of the system - and we must assume that it is since that's what we've been told - this new infusion of public money would be an excellent opportunity to place a high-tech high school somewhere in the African American community. The Kimberley Park

Magnet School program taught us that if you place a unique school with sought after programs and excellent teachers in the black community, people will bring their children. If the school board were to put a high school that concentrated on computers and computer technology, in East Winston white parents would have no problem with enrolling their children there.

We should not support anything that continues to drain the African American community to the benefit of all the other areas of the city and county. It is absolutely wrong for the school board to continue to ignore the critical needs of our community. Brick and mortar are the stimulants for economic development. It is too bad that not enough members of our leadership understand this - especially since white leadership understands it very well.

The writer of the following is the Executive Director of Today's Woman Health and Wellness Center

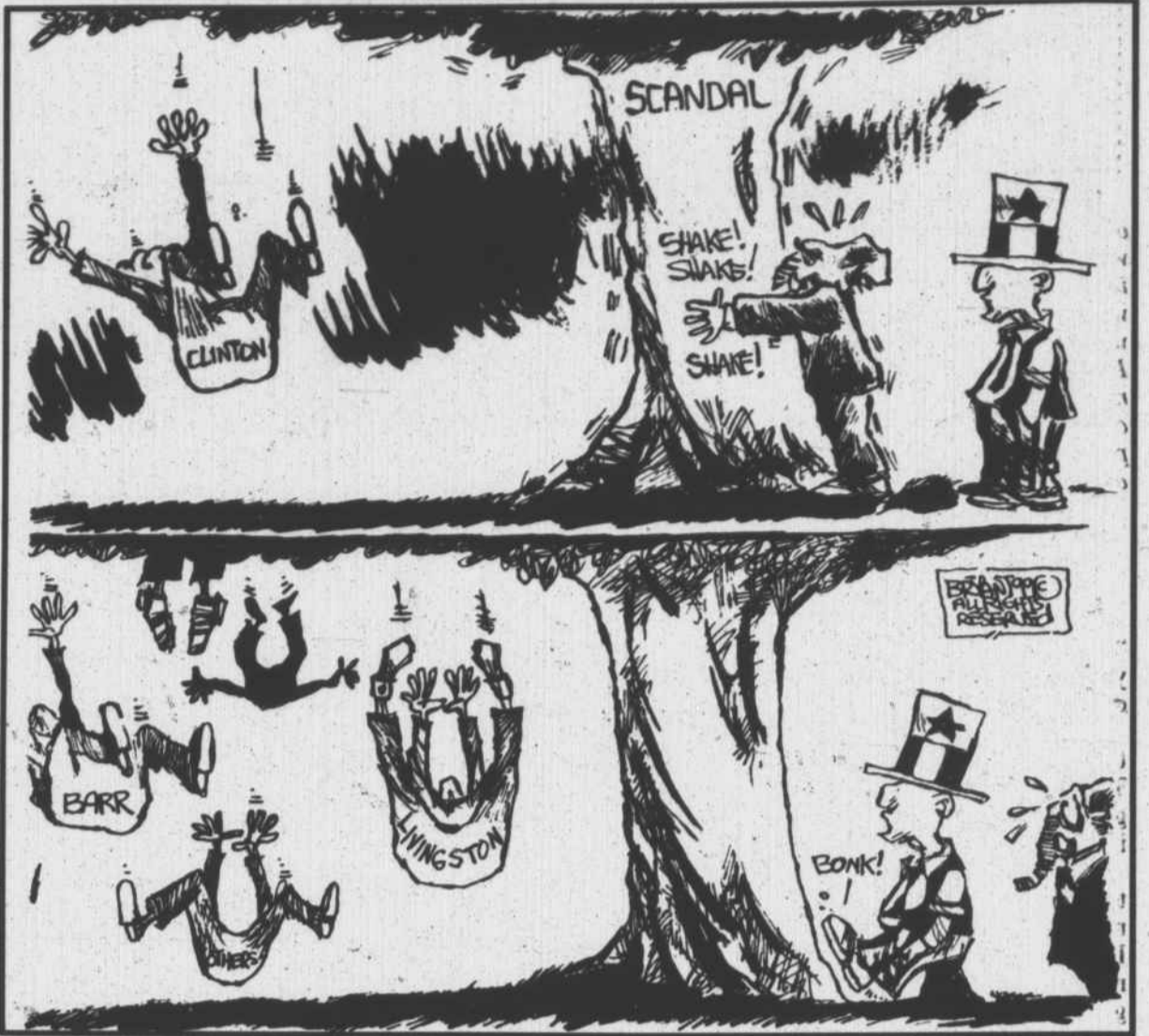
To the Editor:

This letter is just a small token of our appreciation for the wonderful article that was done in your publication last week. Today's Woman Health and Wellness Center was very well presented to the public. Your coverage of the recent award for Perinatal Health Model of Excellence that was present to the center by the State of North Carolina. This award allows the community to know that this center is one that others can model themselves after.

Bravo to your writer Felicia McMillian on her professionalism, style and assistance given to us in obtaining copies (of the edition).

Thanks again for providing this forum to get worthy information across to the Winston-Salem community.

Linda Carter



### 'Still slaves' - community faces long road to good health

**Dr. Frances Ferguson**  
 Guest Columnist



When it comes to inequalities in Healthcare, are African Americans victims of collaborators?

There has been much speculation about the underlying reason for racial/ethnic disparities in the health status of Americans. The fact of the matter is, African Americans have the highest morbidity and mortality rates from nearly all causes, most commonly cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.

Furthermore, young black mothers are still more likely to be under the age of 18, uneducated, unmarried and without prenatal care until late in the pregnancy. These are all important risk factors for poor maternal and fetal outcomes.

And, while black women are more likely than white women to have had four or more pregnancies, the leading cause of death among black males, ages 1-14 and 15-34, remains unintentional injury and homicide, respectively.

As a result, the average African American born today can expect to die six or seven years earlier than his white counterpart, and live a poorer quality of life while living.

The prevailing question is

whether the overall poor health of American blacks is the result of a fundamentally racist healthcare system or the result of genetics and/or poor socioeconomic status.

The question of genetics is moot because the only medical disorder common to the African American gene pool is sickle cell, which, of course, is also found in American Indians, people of Mediterranean descent and even some whites.

There are a far greater number of medical disorders genetically linked and commonly manifested in individuals of European heritage, thereby contradicting the notion that a poor gene pool is a significant factor in the development of poor health.

On the other hand, there is no question that racial bias has a negative impact on the health of African Americans. African Americans have the highest rate of the underinsured, uninsured, and uninsurable in the United States.

Even in this new era of managed care, with its focus on preventive medicine, the system works to the disadvantage of African Americans. One major reason is money. Many black Americans cannot afford the cost of employer-sponsored health insurance, let alone the higher premiums associated with continuing healthcare coverage after leaving a job. Medic-

aid managed care is still an experiment that reaches too few people who could benefit.

As a result, black Americans are more likely to present healthcare providers with longstanding untreated illnesses and suffering from irreversible chronic complications requiring intensive therapy and huge sums of healthcare dollars.

Access to care is further limited because of lack of or inadequacy of government and private sector resources to provide for their extensive medical needs.

Enough said.

The healthcare industry, like all other industries in America, is undoubtedly tainted by racism. It is also quite obvious that socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental risk factors play a major role in the health of blacks. These are the factors which are the most modifiable.

For example, there is an extremely high incidence of tobacco and alcohol usage in the African American community. Tobacco, as well as high fat diets, are associated with cancer and heart disease. Alcohol is a significant risk factor in the development of cancer, infant mortality, homicides, chemical dependency, and unintentional injury. Although stress, poverty, and racism are often cited as reasons for this increased usage, no group of people could have been more stressed, impoverished, and

subjected to racism than our forefathers who were slaves. Surely they would not have escaped the bonds of slavery if their longest vision was the next bottle of gin or bag of crack cocaine.

We are still slaves. The difference is that now we are bonded by cultural superstitions, complacency towards our healthcare, drugs, ethanol, and interracial violence. Slaveholders don't have to mutilate or kill us, we are doing it to ourselves. Perhaps we have long since forgotten what brought the slaves out of the southern United States and those out of Egypt thousands of years ago...God, and the power of prayer.

If we willfully allow the abuse of drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and even cultural superstitions, to control our lives, we will always be slaves to poor health, poverty, and lack of education, not to mention an oppressive society.

We contribute to our own early death sentence by freely partaking of the poisonous fruit so readily provided for us. You can lead a horse to water, but he doesn't have to drink.

Crimes against one's own health are far greater than any acts of racism engineered in the American healthcare system.

Frances E. Ferguson, M.D., practices medicine at Internal Medicine Associates.

## VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY...

The details of Sgt. Brian Barker's shooting and well known now by people throughout the Triad. Although the sheriff's deputy shot himself and then fingered two Hispanics, he has not been fired from his job as of yet, though the district attorney says his ouster is inevitable. We asked local residents if they thought Brian Barker should be fired.



Ida Mae Bradley

"I don't think he should be a deputy because if he did that and pretended that some else did it, he doesn't need to be in law enforcement any more."



Sandra Jordan

"I don't think he should be a deputy because there is something serious going on in his mind. And I don't think that would be good for the safety of the people for his mind to be confused or distraught."



Robin Reaves

"I think it is sad he put himself in the position he put himself in. But I don't think he should be a deputy because they have to deal with all types of people and a lot of people are offended, no matter what color they are, when someone is pinpointed like that. You can't accuse people of something like that."



Roosevelt Bennett

"If you would shoot yourself, you have problems of such that wouldn't require you to be a deputy. I would think."



Harry Andrews

"I don't think he should be a deputy. It is a bad example to the community if we let something get by like that. I don't think that it's right and I don't care who it was."