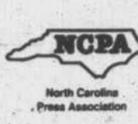


OPINION

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Holmes-Martin fiasco business as usual for arts

It's no secret that racism and segregation exist in the arts community.

Talk with any African American playwright, author or visual artist and they'll talk about how many times doors have been slammed in their face simply because they bring a different image and perspective to a relatively closed community.

Locally, the same holds true.

It's hard for most African Americans, no matter how talented, to find a space at the table.

You can count on two fingers the number of African Americans that head major arts groups in the area and now that select group is minus one.

For almost two years, Roslyn Holmes-Martin served as interim executive director of The Children's Theatre. The group is special in that its mission was to introduce children to theatre. Holmes-Martin's mere presence was a message to those impressionable youths, as well as many adults - both black and white - that it was possible in this town to work your way up in the arts world.

Now, that message has changed and it's business as usual in the world of the arts.

After dedicating years of her life to The Children's Theatre, Holmes-Martin, whose love of theatre began as a child seeing plays produced by the group she would eventually lead, finds herself out in the cold. And even worse, The Children's Theatre, which once boasted a relatively diverse board of directors, finds itself minus its black members who disagreed with the process, used to hire Holmes-Martin's replacement.

Last week, several of the board's members said a vote taken last Monday determined that Holmes-Martin was out. Last Tuesday, the board's chair claimed the position had not been filled, despite Monday's vote.

By Friday, despite the controversy over whether a vote had even been taken, Holmes-Martin was told a new interim director had been hired.

In response, Holmes-Martin tendered her resignation.

Closer scrutiny needs to be given to the diversity of groups that receive public money - as The Children's Theatre does through The Arts Council. The Arts Council was nifty in its side-stepping of the controversy, claiming it doesn't interfere with the running of the organizations to which it gives money.

But the fact remains that The Children's Theatre, through The Arts Council, received money from taxpayers - both black and white - and the group needs to be held accountable when it comes to diversity.

How many black groups receive funding from The Arts Council each year? And how diverse are the predominantly white groups that year after year count on the Council for funding?

Those are questions many taxpayers are asking after the Holmes-Martin fiasco.

And those are questions that our African American elected officials should be asking.

Why Kosovo?

Each time I look at the coverage of Kosovo and its suffering refugees, I can't help but wonder what would have happened if the media had cared about the victims of the Rwandan slaughter.

What if the cameras had shown us tears and families and let us know about the dreams for the future that had been interrupted by machetes in the hands of mass butchers? What if we knew the names of the victims, the kinds of food they ate, the kinds of jobs they held?

Instead, most often what we saw of the genocide in Rwanda were fleeting images of bloated bodies going over Victoria Falls, but never did the media humanize the African story in the way it is doing minute by minute in Eastern Europe.

The difference between how the media and the Clinton White House treated Rwanda vs. Kosovo presents a nagging question. Are U.S. foreign policy makers blinded by race?

In April 1994, 300 people were killed every hour for 100 days and between 500,000 and one million died in the space of only three months. Yet the response from the United States, the Organization of African Unity, the United Nations and the Catholic Church, which is deeply involved in the affairs of Rwanda, was not to help prevent the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus.



If, however, the "global cops" can intervene in Europe, why couldn't they help Rwanda? And why aren't the news media publicly agonizing over this terrible omission and heeding the warnings that another carnage could happen there all over again?

Ironically the genocide in

Rwanda took place about 50 years after the Holocaust. Yet the very U.N. that was created in part to ensure that it would never happen again, did not try to stop it when it did.

I wonder if the international community will get away with sitting on its hands, supporting a

non-intervention policy after intervening in Kosovo.

Barbara Reynolds is a contributing columnist for the National Newspaper Publishers Association. She recently published "No, I Won't Shut Up: 30 Years of Telling it Like It Is."

Hatred fueled brutal killings



Earl Ofari Hutchinson

Guest Columnist

"I hate Niggers."

These chilling words were spit out by one of the two mass killers as he pumped bullets into the head of a black student in the second floor library at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo.

According to an eyewitness, the killer then stepped back and laughed about his murderous handiwork.

The slain black student was one of 15 killed by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris in the worst high school massacre in U.S. history. To explain their rampage much of the media and public officials quickly dragged out the standard "bad kids, bad homes" line. But this is far too easy.

The murders were hate crimes driven by hatred of blacks, Latinos and Jews. The killers made absolutely no secret of this. For weeks they and their pals defiantly displayed Hitler idolatry, pranced around the campus with Nazi-style paraphernalia, boasted about playing mock war games and took every chance they could to try and intimidate and harass students, especially minority students.

When students repeatedly warned authorities and police that Harris and Klebold were a menace, they did nothing. And even after police publicly stated that the two probably had help from other students in their murderous onslaught, school authorities still remain tight-lipped about these "other" students.

But the bigger danger is that neo-Nazi, Aryan Nation and Skinhead groups, through books, pamphlets, and legions of Internet web sites, have deeply infected thousands of young white males like Klebold and Harris with their hate-filled message. The overwhelming majority of the more than 8,000 hate crimes reported in the United States in 1997 were committed by young white males.

The examples of recent hate-motivated carnage are the murders of Sherrice Iverson, James Byrd, Matthew Sheppard and Billy Jack Gaither. There have been deadly assaults on gays and minorities in Washington, Oregon, North Carolina, California and Colorado. In all cases the perpetrators were young white males.

A recent survey taken by MTV revealed that more than 90 percent of young people aged 12-24 considered hate crimes a "very serious" or a "somewhat serious" national problem.

One out of five young people said that they knew someone who

had been the victim of a hate crime.

The response of state and federal officials and police agencies to the hate violence threat from men such as Klebold and Harris still wildly varies.

Under the Hate Crimes Act, 12 states submitted no data to the FBI on hate crimes in 1997, and a dozen states still have no laws on the books targeting racially motivated hate crimes. Some states permit the prosecution of hate crimes only if they are committed in conjunction with another crime. Also, only a handful of states permit judges to increase penalties when racial bias is proven as the motive for the crime.

Even more disturbing, more than half of all police agencies still have no hate task force units or specific procedures for dealing with hate crimes.

Littleton is a classic example of this. Police and public officials there still refuse to call the Columbine High School massacre a hate crime.

The proposed Hate Crimes Act of 1999 is supposed to make it much easier to crack down on violent or potentially violent hate mongers. It would increase the types of hate crimes prosecuted and the penalties for them. It has been stalled for months in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Despite the clear evidence that

hate violence ignited the Columbine massacre, the measure still isn't likely to budge from there any time soon. Instead Congress is going in the exact opposite direction and proposing knee-jerk draconian laws that criminalize all teens.

Meanwhile Clinton requests that the Departments of Education and Justice compile an annual "report card" on school safety and hate crimes on school campuses. There is no word when or whether they will comply. Even though Clinton expressed worry about the racist remarks reportedly made by Klebold and Harris, he advised parents to talk to their children about the gruesome violence but not about how racial, religious or gender hate triggers it.

Klebold and Harris killed themselves in what police call a "suicide mission."

But their deaths are no substitute for prompt reporting by school officials of hate crimes and tough enforcement by police of hate crime laws.

This is the best way to ensure that what happened at Columbine High School does not happen again.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is the author of "The Crisis in Black and Black."

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VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY...

The Colorado high school shootings have captured the attention of the nation and have once again brought up the issue of safety in schools. They are the latest in a long spree of school shootings that have stretched across the country. We asked local parents and grand parents if the shootings have made them fearful of sending their children to school.



Edith Whithers

"I would be scared, especially if I had small children. They are supposed to go to school to learn, not to be scared."



James Bryant

"It might spread here. The way kids are brought up today, it's hard to tell what they are plotting. My cousin came home the other day and said a student said he was going to shoot the teacher in the forehead. What is that going to make us parents feel like when we send our kids to school?"



Ken McCollum

"I'm more afraid because it seems like it is safer to keep your kids at home. And the publicity it is getting is not helping. I think it is giving other kids ideas about doing things like this."



Mamie G. Brown

"I'm not only frightened for my grandson, who is at Speas Elementary School, but for every mother's and father's child because we cannot feel completely safe unless they are completely living in Jesus. And also parents need to take responsibility for their children's actions and know of their whereabouts and activities. Strict gun restrictions also should be put into place."



Dosie James

"I have three (grandchildren) in South Carolina and others in New York. It makes me a little nervous when they go to school, but I leave in the hands of the good Lord."