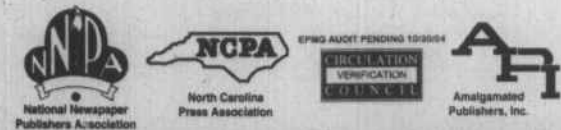


OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Rudy Anderson, a member of the Wentz Memorial United Church of Christ choir, performs during Saturday's Juneteenth celebration at Mount Pleasant.

Free?

African-Americans celebrated their Independence Day Saturday, but most of us did not know it. There were no fireworks or PBS specials from the National Mall, but a faithful few around the nation did not let the day pass without acknowledging Juneteenth.

It is the oldest African-American holiday and probably the most obscure as well. Juneteenth, June 19, celebrates the day in 1865 that the last slaves in the United States were informed that they had been freed from bondage by the Emancipation Proclamation. Before that day, Independence Day in the country could only truly be celebrated by white Americans. Although black and

white Americans had fought side by side nearly a century earlier to free America from the chains of England, it was only the whites that could truly take a whiff of the sweet smell of freedom. It is one of those ugly ironies in this country that tarnishes our history.

The Fourth of July will remain an important day for all Americans. It is the day that we remember those who fought and died, black and white, to make this country what it is today. But we should not let the Fourth of July or Juneteenth pass without giving thought to our history and the true meaning of independence and freedom, contradictions and all.

Reviving Independence

Independence High School, or some variation of it, will reopen this August after its doors were chained up for the last year. The school system says the new Independence will be better than ever, with new elective classes and a more concentrated focus of counseling students and guiding them. Whatever the new school is or is not, it has to be better than the ill-planned day schools that the school system implemented this past school year.

The day schools were set up for disappointment and failure. One teacher to teach a class of 30 students who are in different grade levels and taking various courses of studies was insane and shabby. The school system has too many millions to nickel and

dime students the way the day school plan did.

Independence was not a perfect school by far. Students were not passing their classes; that's if they bothered to show up for school at all. But the school was at least something to which students could relate. It had various teachers for different classes, hallways, a cafeteria and a principal. The day schools were as different from a high school as you could get. The school system has said that it saved more than half a million dollars over the year that Independence was closed. Whether that money is worth the education (or lack thereof) that day school students received last year is still a question that has to be answered.

The case for uncles and aunts day



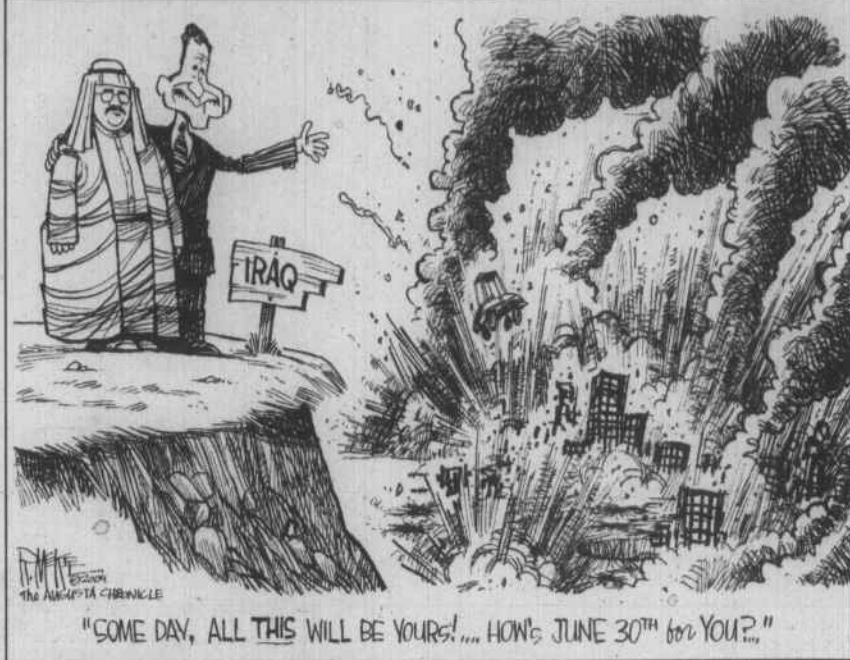
George E. Curry
 Guest Columnist

I had just finished eating dinner on Father's Day when my mother called on my cell phone and tearfully told me that one of her brothers, Percy Harris, was in intensive care at DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Mama was so distraught that she had to repeat her message before I could comprehend what she was saying. She had no details except that Uncle Percy was in intensive care.

That set in motion a series of calls. First, I contacted Aunt Julia Mae Cousin in Johnson City, Tenn. Since Big Mama died in 1968, Aunt Julia Mae has been titular head of the family and Percy's wife, Gloria, had contacted her first. Aunt Julia Mae told a few relatives who, in turn, contacted other family members. Aunt Julia Mae told me that Percy was in the hospital and as soon as she could, she would head to Alabama, where she and her brothers and sisters were born, to see about her brother.

Next, I called my sister, Charlotte Purvis in Durham, N.C. Charlotte is the oldest of my three younger sisters, and she always knows exactly what to do in a crisis. She suggested that I call the hospital and that I find a way to put Mama at ease. I delayed calling my other two sisters - Sue Gandy in Tuskegee, Ala., and Chris Polk in California - until I had more specifics. After speaking with Charlotte, I called my cousin Lynn Stuart in Nashville. I promised to get back to him later in the day.

I telephoned a cousin on my father's side of the family, Mary Linebarger, who lives less than five minutes from the hospital. Mary placed me on a three-way call with a nurse in the intensive care unit who would tell me only



that Uncle Percy was in stable condition. That was encouraging enough to again call Mama and Aunt Julia Mae to give them a status report. By the way Mama had been reacting, you'd think that Uncle Percy had one foot in the grave. But Mama is very close to and protective of all of her brothers. Come to think of it, over the years, all of my aunts have been like that. They call my uncles spoiled and then proceed to spoil them.

Finally, I was able to reach Uncle Percy's wife, Gloria, in Tuscaloosa and she gave me the full story, which I was able to relay to Mama, my sisters and my cousin Lynn. Essentially, Uncle Percy had begun choking on a hot dog last Friday and experienced difficulty breathing. He tried various maneuvers to dislodge the hot dog but couldn't. He drove himself to the Maude Whatley Health Center, near McKenzie Courts, our old housing projects, and hailed a taxi.

Upon reaching the hospital, they discovered that Uncle Percy

had punctured a hole in his esophagus in the process of trying to regain his breath and that it required immediate surgery. The surgery went well and Uncle Percy is expected to remain in the hospital another week or two.

While frantically trying to discover what had happened to Uncle Percy and his prospects for the future, I thought how ironic that this was happening on Father's Day and that we have no special holidays to honor our aunts and uncles. That's a shame. And it's even more of one when you consider that we have special days for bosses and secretaries at work, but not the people who spoiled us almost as much as our grandparents.

My favorite Uncle Percy story involves another uncle, his brother, Jesse Harris ("Padna"), four years my senior, was the brother I never had. He taught me how to play basketball and agreed to teach me how to drive shortly before my 16th birthday. There was only one hitch: We didn't have a car. That's where

Uncle Percy comes in. Once he turned in for the night, "Padna" and I would slip the keys out of his pocket and go driving. By the time we came back, someone else would have parked in Uncle Percy's original parking space. This went on for several weeks before Uncle Percy busted us one night. He ran toward us and we ran toward Big Mama, who told him to leave us alone. I could always count on Big Mama.

Let's add a special holiday for aunts and uncles. At least once a year, we'll be prompted to reflect on some of our great childhood memories.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNP News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. His most recent book is "The Best of Emergent Magazine," an anthology published by Ballantine Books. Curry's weekly radio commentary is syndicated by Capitol Radio News Service (301/588-1993). He can be reached through his Web site, georgecurry.com.

Trees versus people



Ernie Pitt
 This & That

I received a very interesting phone call last week regarding the tree removal in the Cleveland Avenue Homes community. These apartments are owned and managed by the Housing Authority of the City of Winston-Salem (HAWS). I was called as the chairman of the board of commissioners of the Housing Authority. I was told by this gentleman to get in touch with the executive director, Dr. J. Reid Lawrence, and tell him to cease and desist immediately in the removal of those trees.

I try to be patient and understanding anytime I receive a call from whomever. I try as best I can to listen attentively to the speaker in order to clearly understand what the problem is and then try to reach a win-win solution. This time, however, I found this call to be somewhat strange: The person whose name I have forgotten demanded that I stop the tree removal right then and there. I asked the person if he lived in the Cleveland Avenue community and he said no. He said he just felt like cutting those trees down was not the right thing to do. Of course, I had to respectfully disagree because of the reasons the authority had to cut them down: not all of the trees, just about 17 or so of the 80 or so trees.

I have never received a call from anyone from the other side of town expressing concern over the hardships that many of our residents face each and every day - things like no jobs, low-paying jobs, drive-by shootings, overcrowdedness, little or no economic development in the area, infant mortal-



Workers prepare the area where trees were cut down in Cleveland Avenue Homes.

ity, inadequate housing, few recreational facilities, aging population with people who really should be moving into elderly facilities but can't afford to, high cost of medicines, poor health care, and on and on.

The executive director of the authority has a massive task before him. Part of his job is to ensure the safety and welfare of the residents, provide quality housing (all of the apartments in Cleveland have air conditioning), and he must conform to guidelines and directives issued by HUD. It may not take a rocket scientist to do this job but it sure takes someone with the knowledge, intelligence and experience to carry it out properly. In my humble opinion Dr. Lawrence has done his job and has done it

quite well.

Many may remember that part of the authority's problems six years or so ago were related to not following HUD guidelines and regulations. We are doing that now and are being touted all over the country as a high performance housing authority. Many agencies from across the country are now trying to learn from us. We have one of the few successful HOPE VI programs in the country.

Removing those trees was an act of decency and protection of the residents. Many of the roots had broken up the sidewalks, grown so large that they were bursting sewer and water lines as well as disfiguring retaining walls. Additionally, some of them posed a problem during ice storms and

made it difficult if not impossible to grow grass, thereby creating further erosion control problems. In fact, the authority had been cited for the very things it is trying to correct by removing and replanting trees.

Anyway, I love trees but I also care about the health and welfare of my fellow citizens, particularly those who reside in units owned and/or operated by HAWS. We care even when there is no imminent threat of danger. God loves people who are servants to mankind. We try hard to serve our residents. God bless you, Amen!

Ernie Pitt is the publisher of The Chronicle and the chairman of the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem Board of Commissioners. E-mail him at erpitt@wschronicle.com.

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