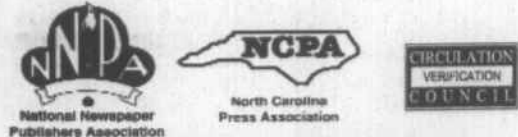


# OPINION

## THE CHRONICLE

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## A true gift of Christmas



**Marian Wright Edelman**

Guest Columnist

Christmas is a festive time when many families come together, homes are decorated with trees hung with ornaments and lights and sumptuous dinners are prepared. Christmas also can be, for a variety of reasons, a time of stress. One source of stress is the oppression of the shopping list. The longer the list, the greater the anxiety—what shall I get for this niece or that cousin or friend? How do I avoid giving a gift that's too similar to what I gave last year? And of course there are the demands of children who want the latest video game or electronic gadget. Bending to the pressure, many of us join the legions of shoppers hunched over and weighted down by bags full of holiday things.

Amidst it all, we lose sight of the meaning of Christmas. We forget to tell our children why we give gifts in the first place—the story Christians believe about the first Christmas' gift to the world of the Prince of Peace. When he walked on the Earth, he spoke to us of the gifts that really matter: "For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." This message of giving speaks to what's good in and required of all of us.

Christmas is a time to enrich the lives of our children by sharing with them the joy and gift of giving. This can be done in many ways. While shopping with your children, have them select a toy to give to a poor child. Some time during the Christmas season, take your children to a homeless shelter or soup kitchen and volunteer to help prepare or serve food. Bake together a few dozen cookies and take them to your local children's hospital or nursing home to brighten the day of someone less fortunate.

There are many in need not only in our own communities but in our global community. I'm reminded of the wonderful children's story of Beatrice's Goat by Page McBrier about a young Ugandan girl whose dream of going to school seems out of reach because her family

is poor. But things change for Beatrice when her family is selected to receive a goat from Heifer International, a program that provides livestock to those in need around the world. After months dutifully tending the goat and selling its milk at the market, Beatrice finally has enough money to pay for books and a school uniform. Then one day, dressed in her new school uniform, after taking the goat's milk to market, Beatrice makes her way to her first day of school.

You can participate in the Heifer International program (heifer.org) by giving a struggling family in another land the gift of a goat, alpaca, camel, cow, donkey, horse, llama, pig, sheep, a water buffalo, yak, honey bees, a school of fish or a flock of chickens, ducks or geese. The lives of the receiving family will be improved economically by the wool, eggs, milk or honey provided by the animals. In exchange, the receiving family promises to pass the first offspring on to another family—it's called "Passing on the Gift." This living chain of giving is a dynamic and sustainable approach to grassroots economic development.

The gift of a dairy goat (at \$120) can supply a family several quarts of nutritious milk a day—a ton of milk a year. Extra milk can be sold or used to make cheese, butter or yogurt. Goats can thrive in extreme climates and on poor, dry land by eating grass and leaves. Because goats often have two or three kids a year, Heifer partners can help lift themselves out of poverty by starting small dairies that earn money for food, health care and education. Geese (at \$20) are easy to care for. They don't require much shelter and can adapt to most climates. They can lay up to 75 eggs a year providing a ready source of protein and income.

My grandchildren picked the animals they wanted me to give in their honor with great excitement! This year I'm also buying my grandchildren three banks each for Christmas: one for saving, one for spending, and one for sharing. I hope this will teach them the value of thrift and how to share their good fortune with others. I also hope this will help them understand the true meaning of Christmas.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund, [childrensdefense.org](http://childrensdefense.org), and its Action Council.



## Examine white male pathology



**A. Peter Bailey**  
Guest Columnist

Once again young White males, who are junior members of the most powerful, pampered and protected special interest group in this country, have embarked on a spree of mass killings. They join a long list of White male mass killers and sexual predator killers, who have emerged in the U.S. during the past 50 years. Yet, when politicians, academicians, pundits and other propagandists write about or discuss the actions of their fellow White males, the focus is on the individual killers. There is very little commentary about the pathology of White males as a group. However, those same commentators, when discussing or writing about homicide rates among low-income Black males, don't hesitate to refer to the

pathology of Black males, as a group. Who is more pathological—the person who kills someone who "disrespected" him or took his woman or moved in on his drug turf or someone who sexually brutalizes and murders numerous women just for a thrill or shoots up a school, a shopping mall or a church because his feelings were hurt? Apparently, there is an urgent need for a serious investigation of White male pathology.

For the past several months, while monitoring Sunday morning public affairs program on NBC, CBS, ABC and FOX News Sunday, it becomes obvious that there is a concerted effort to avoid too much discussion around the race angle in Barack Obama's campaign to be the Democratic candidate for the presidency in 2008. It's as though his candidacy is just another example of this country's commitment to freedom and liberty for all. The whole scene reminds me of how the same group of propagandas avoided and continues to avoid the very real possi-

bility that Al Gore lost his run for the presidency in 2000 because he had Senator Joe Lieberman (Jewish) as a running mate. The Republicans are trying hard to disguise the fact that they are salivating at the prospect of running against Obama. They are confident that at crunch time, no matter what they say to pollsters their fellow Whites are not going to elect a Black male as president, even one who has been quoted as saying that "In the history of African American politics in this country there has always been some tension between speaking in universal terms and speaking in race-specific terms about the plight of the African-American community. By virtue of my background, you know, I am more likely to speak in universal terms." Harold Ford tried that same approach when he ran for governor of Tennessee in 2006. He still won't admit what hit him.

There is probably no more despicable public figure than a chicken hawk, a person who consistently and loudly advocates

military action by the United States, while arrogantly avoiding being among those citizens who actually put their lives on the line. Perhaps the quintessential chicken hawk is William Kristol, who perches smugly on his chair, supporting the military venture in Iraq and advocating military action against Iran. I called Kristol's office and asked if he was now or has even been in the military. The answer was no. If Kristol truly believes that this country's national security is at stake in the Middle East, it is disgusting that he and his fellow chicken hawks aren't on the frontline defending that threatened national security. It is pathetic to see low-income and working class Blacks, Whites and Latinos sending their children off to be maimed and killed in a war of choice launched by a bunch of trash-talking chicken hawks. As long as they are willing to do so Kristol and his flock of chicken hawk pals will support and launch military adventures.

A. Peter Bailey is a longtime journalist and social activist.

## Film honors black oral tradition



**George Curry**  
Guest Columnist

About a decade ago, conservative commentator Armstrong Williams and I were debating the issue of affirmative action on a University of North Carolina campus.

"May I ask you a question?" Williams uttered. "You just did," I curtly replied. "Well, may I ask you another one?" Williams continued. "You just did that, too," I retorted. When Williams became visibly agitated, I knew I had disrupted his train of thought and would easily win the debate.

No, I didn't learn that technique from the talking heads on TV. I learned that in my debate classes at Knoxville College in the late 1960s. There are many settings in which debating skills can be helpful, whether it is in thinking clearly, developing refined arguments or effectively making a point.

When "The Great Debaters," starring and directed by Denzel Washington and produced by Oprah Winfrey, opens in theaters on Christmas Day, I am hoping it will have a revolutionary impact on young people and give them a better appreciation for effective communication.

Sometimes I wonder what Mr. Austin, my debate teacher at Knoxville College, or Mrs. Malinda Prude, one of my English teachers at Druid High School in Tuscaloosa, Ala., would say about how our young people express themselves today. I'm no prude yet I am astonished by the vulgarity and plain incoherence I hear, whether listening to teens talk to one another or hearing them chat—usually loudly—on the cell phone. Let's face it, much of it is unintelligible.

And what we can decipher does not paint a pretty picture. I had just finished speaking at a university when a young man approached me after my presentation. After every other fragmented



Some of the young cast members of the film.

sentence, he added: "Know what I am sayin'?" Finally, I told him no, I didn't know what he was saying. Further, if I knew what he was saying, there would be no need for him to say it again.

Many adults are also sloppy in their use of language. I've heard adults refer to "reverting back" too many times to count. How else can one revert? You can't revert forward. Or, they will ask you to "repeat that again." Repeat, by definition, is again. Even more prevalent are people saying they need to go to an ATM machine. ATM stands for Automated Teller Machine. So, when one says he or she is going to the "ATM machine," they are, in effect, saying they are going to the "automated teller machine machine."

Perhaps we'd hear less of this nonsense if more people had studied the art of debate, which is what inspired the movie. "The Great Debaters" is based on a 1935 national championship debate between Wiley, a historically Black college in Texas, and the University of Southern California, the defending national champion. In typical Hollywood fashion, Wiley's opponent is changed to Harvard instead of U.S.C.

The debate coach, Melvin B.

Tolson, was born in Moberly, Mo., and graduated from Lincoln University, a historically Black college in Pennsylvania. Wiley hired him in 1924 to teach English and speech. He also coached the junior varsity football team, headed the theater club and formed the Wiley Forensic Society, the debating team. Over a 15-year-period, Wiley College lost only one of 75 debates.

Denzel Washington told reporters that both hip-hop and a form of poetry known as the spoken word have their roots in Black oral tradition. "Our oral history is rich and deep, and debating is a big part of it," Washington said.

Tolson left Wiley in 1947 to teach at another HBCU, Langston University in Oklahoma. He later served two terms as mayor of Langston and Liberia declared him its poet laureate. He died in 1966.

Wiley, which has an enrollment of less than 900, is located in Marshall, Texas, a town of 24,000 people approximately 140 miles east of Dallas. It has produced such distinguished alumni as James Farmer, the former head of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and Herman Sweat, who won a landmark Supreme Court decision against the

University of Texas' Whites-only admission policy.

In recent years, the college has struggled with limited finances and resources. "The Great Debaters" is expected to shine a spotlight on the college, perhaps enabling it to increase fundraising and enrollment. The debate team, which was dismantled upon Tolson's departure, has been revived and students are eager to join upon learning about what the school calls a David vs. Goliath victory over a major White university with considerably more means.

Wiley President Haywood Strickland hopes the movie will strike a blow for all HBCUs, whose worth is often devalued. Representing only 3 percent of the nation's colleges and universities, HBCUs account for a quarter of all Black college graduates.

"The Davids of the world are the Wiley Colleges of the world," President Strickland said. "We do have a slingshot called the mind."

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of *Emerge* magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, [www.georgecurry.com](http://www.georgecurry.com).

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