

Editorials & Comments

City Needs District Representation

By Hoyle H. Martin
Post Executive Editor

During the municipal elections last year there was considerable agreement among the candidates of both parties that some form of district representation is desirable for the City of Charlotte. In fact, the election of seven council members, who campaigned in part on a promise of supporting the districting concept, was in reality a public endorsement of the idea.

Considering this background, it was therefore surprising that in mid-October the council had a 4-3 split vote in favor of a proposal calling for the development of a districting plan to be submitted to the voters for approval on May 17, 1977.

However, in a surprise move, Mayor John Belk used a little-known first-time-used veto power to defeat the measure. This action was subsequently over-turned on a legal technicality over whether the action was an "ordinance" or a simple motion.

Many supporters of district representation viewed the vote against the concept by councilmen Jim Whittington, Joe Withrow and Louis Davis as a failure to keep their campaign promises. Withrow and Davis contend that they favor districting but that it should follow, not precede, city and county consolidation. Whittington said district representation might result in "eroding the good local government we have."

View Lacks Merits

Both of these arguments for opposing district representation are weak and lack merit. The let's-wait-for-consolidation point of view lacks merit because there are too many "ifs," "buts" and "whens" involved to know when in fact the two local governments will actually merge. While in fact consolidation is gradually taking place through the increasing merger of public services and through the city's continuous expansion via annexation, the merger of the two governmental bodies that districting is being delayed, that is, those in positions of power do not want to share that power.

The second reason for opposing districting, Whittington's "eroding...good local government" simply does not coincide with the facts. Charlotte's history of district representation dates back to 1851 when a ward system was instituted that continued until 1917. In that year the city developed a three member commission form of government that resulted in the ending of the ward system. In 1929 city government was again re-organized in favor of a council-manager format

(as currently exists). By 1935 when the council was enlarged from five to eleven the ward system was revived.

Quick Abolishment

Local history records that the ward system worked well with little or no evidence of any corruption from its inception in 1851 until 1945. In that year Bishop Dale, a black political leader, nearly won a council seat from the Second Ward. That "scare," according to many long-time black residents of the city, resulted in a quick abolishment of the ward system. Thus, it was not corruption but racism that led to the demise of the ward system.

Fortunately, it appears that as a city we have matured beyond racism at least to the extent of recognizing that power must be shared if the community at large is to have any power at all. Proof of this is in the fact that after considerable foot-dragging the City Council may take some definite action on the districting concept as early as next week. This move has been brought about by community group petitions favoring some form of district representation.

We hope that the Council's actions will be the beginning of the end of political decision-making power being concentrated in southeast Charlotte. Furthermore, we hope their actions will be the beginning of more than token representation in local government for blacks, beginning representation for other geographic areas and socio-economic groups, and finally, a meaningful start toward a smooth transition to consolidation.

To this end we hope that those council members who expressed the minority view will now see the wisdom in supporting the concept of district representation. It will only be through such support that Charlotte can be a true example of what democracy is all about.

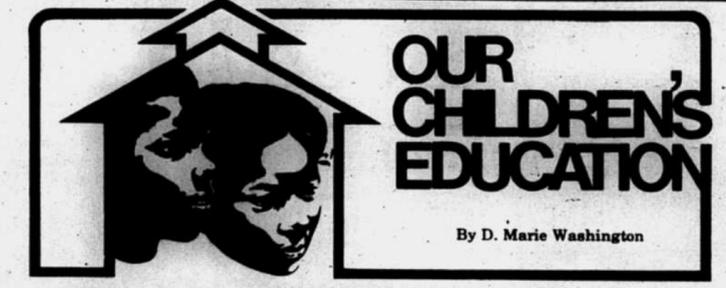
Something On Your Mind

Something on your mind is the name of a column devoted to our readers of this newspaper—as long as it relates in some way to young people, regardless of age.

It will be written by you and about whatever is on your mind!

So, if you have something to say...WRITE ON!

Some subjects that may be of special interest to you are: Drugs, Generation Gaps, Welfare, Gangs, School, Going Steady, Police Revolution, Whites, Blacks, Integration, Busing, Draft, God, Negro churches, etc.



Crystal Ball Gazing

Centuries of trying to take a peek into the future has led man to discover a certain truth about forecasting. He has discovered that once the human mind believes in a certain thing, it proceeds to make that thing happen. It is the belief in the forecast which causes it to come true.

This fact about the way a person's beliefs can influence events has been stated in many ways, and now we have it documented in a study by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson and presented in a book entitled PYGMALION IN THE CLASSROOM (Holt, 1968). This study was an experiment in which some teachers were led to believe that a certain group of children were "late bloomers" and had high potential to achieve. Nothing of the sort had been indicated about these children, but since the teachers were made to believe that the children were "smart," the children's I.Q. scores actually went up as a result. The study concluded that teachers' expectations have a tremendous influence upon children's achievement. Thus, if children are expected to be smart, they become smart; and if children are expected to be slow, they become slow.

While many educators agree that low expectations on

the part of teachers may indeed be the cause of poor academic performance in inner city schools, the big question has been - how do we go about turning those expectations around? But perhaps instead of asking, how can we change teachers' expectations, we should be asking - what causes teachers to hold low expectations of some children in the first place?

Expectations come from many sources, but the greatest shaper of expectations is a modern kind of crystal ball called testing. From the results of tests administered to children almost immediately upon their entry into school, the children receive various labels describing their intelligence. Those children who are labeled with such positive words as "smart" "intelligent" and "bright" are expected by their teachers to shine in just about everything - and they do. They carry such a positive aura about them that they can literally do no wrong, and they are chosen for every good thing which the school has to offer in the form of praise and rewards. On the other hand, children who are given the highly negative labels such as "slow" or "low" begin to move within such a negative light that they seem to be able to do nothing right. They soon ac-

cept for themselves the same low expectations which their teachers have for them, and they gradually grow to believe they are intellectually inferior and begin to perform accordingly. This often leads children to direct their energies into such non-creative, non-productive pursuits that, in addition to being labelled "slow" or "dumb," they also become labelled "bad," a "problem" or a "troublemaker." Thus, they fulfill the expectations decreed by their labels not only in the academic area, but also in their behavior.

The negative results of predictive testing have been keenly felt by Black communities, since the tests are based upon the White, middle-class culture and therefore places Blacks and other minority children at a severe disadvantage.

Many educators have protested the practice of predictive testing because of the serious damage which it does. But it is an extremely difficult practice to stop, not only because it is so firmly entrenched within the educational system, but also because many teachers believe they can't teach without it - they can't. Thus, the crystal ball continues to work with complete accuracy, fulfilling it's own prophecy.

TO BE EQUAL



Vernon E. Jordan Jr.

Amnesty Issue Revived

President-elect Carter has indicated that one of his first acts of office will be to issue some form of pardon for Vietnam draft resisters as a step toward finally burying the searing divisions of that unwanted war.

My experience on President Ford's Presidential Clemency Board helped convince me that such a step is right and is long overdue.

Reviewing the cases that came before the Board, I found that many of the draft evaders and resisters and deserters were not pampered middle class kids seeking to evade responsibility but that they fell largely into two categories. The first was made up of large numbers of young men whose personal problems and experiences were such that they should not have served at all, while the second group consisted of persons whose convictions should have enabled them to win conscientious objector status.

Not enough people took advantage of the Board's existence. Some were distrusting of any official group, thinking it was a trap. Others were put off by the requirements attached to clemency. Still others had a multitude of personal reasons for refusing to apply to the Board.

So the Clemency Board really didn't do the job of burying the Vietnam divisions. Nor did it begin to tackle the big hidden problem of the Vietnam era - the more than 350,000 veterans of the Vietnam era who got less than honorable discharges.

The real losses to individuals holding such discharges are enormous. A less than honorable discharge means its holder is disqualified from a wide range of veterans' benefits ranging from G.I. Bill educational and employment aid to Veterans Administration medical care and civil service point preferences.

Since so many of the less than honorable discharges are held by men who served for significant periods of time in the armed forces, and many who saw combat duty, this is a sad situation. But it is made worse by the fact that such discharges are often administratively imposed, the fruits of personality conflicts with superior officers, minor frictions that would be meaningless in civilian life, and - too often - racism.

How else to explain that in the Vietnam era blacks were twice as likely as whites to receive less than honorable discharges? Just as black GI's were more likely to find themselves in combat, more likely to be wounded, and more likely to die in action, so too did being black place a man in greater jeopardy of being separated from the service with the stigma of a less than honorable discharge.

Recognizing the serious injustices of many such discharges the Army has begun outreach programs to grant hearings reviewing such discharges, but such a piecemeal effort still leaves many untouched.

Any amnesty program should include provision for dealing with the larger problem of veterans holding less than honorable discharges, and it should also spur changes in the way we treat those who fought and returned to find joblessness and discrimination.

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as i see it

Crashing, Not Flying, Bothers Our Columnist

By Gerald O. Johnson

It is no secret that one of my favorite traveling modes is the automobile. Hence, it took no one by surprise when I acted like a fool about flying to Orlando, Florida for a conference recently.

But after all was said and done I ended up flying. Note that I only ended up flying after I was literally dragged to the plane by my traveling companions. Don't get me wrong though. I am not afraid of flying. Crashing is what bothers me.

However, I am an infrequent flyer. I think I have traveled by plane 20 times in my life. I might add that I am not anxious for my 21st flight. Each time that I fly, once I get above the clouds I start seeing angels. The host of angels gather around my window and start singing "Nearer My God To Thee." I've always wondered why I thought like this since the plane would be headed towards hell if it crashed.

But the funny thing is when you fly no one wants you to know that they are afraid.

When you board the plane everybody is so friendly. Even the bigots act friendly. Everybody is talking and having a good time. Then the plane taxis to the runway. The engines roar, the wings extend, and like a bat out of hell, zoom, you are airborne. If you look around you all the talking has ceased. Everybody is pretending to be asleep. As soon as the plane levels off and everything appears to be O.K. there is a mad rush to the bathroom. The reason for this is taking-off scares the out of you.

Now everybody is gay again; laughing, joking having a good time.

All of a sudden you hit an air pocket. The plane jerks, jumps, and then sputters. Silence enters the cabin again. A few people get up and go back to the "John." Then somebody lets out a sheepish grin and the fun starts up again.

I think I know how a pair of "fruit-of-the-loom" feels when it gets washed. Hitting an air pocket must be synonymous with that.

Anyway, everybody contin-



Gerald O. Johnson

ues to have a good time until the plane is ready to land. Then everybody starts yawning and immediately falls off to sleep. Once on the ground everybody returns to his original character and starts pushing and shoving, ignoring and the works. It is like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Your entire flight takes 30 minutes and now you have to wait an hour for your baggage.

The most disappointing aspect of the entire trip has to be

the stewardesses. The commercials paint such a lovely picture of the stewardess. A lovely, shapely, creature who

is there to make your trip more comfortable. Untrue on both accounts.

On my flights the stewardesses were frightening. They looked like casualties of a plane crash. I mean looking at those young ladies was enough to make me want to go to the "John."

I asked one young lady if I had to change planes in Atlanta after the pilot had just announced that they would be continuing on to Los Angeles from Atlanta. She looked at me coldly for about a minute as if to imply "no fool you can stay on and go to L.A." And then she shook her head in the affirmative.

Seriously though folks, there is probably no safer and no more efficient mode of transportation than flying commercially. If you think about it for awhile you will soon realize like I did that the fears are based on limited exposure.

We know about automobiles

because practically everyone owns and operates one. But only a limited few get a chance to travel by plane.

Consequently, our fears are more lack of knowledge than fear.

For example, deaths caused by automobile accidents far exceeds those deaths caused by commercial airplane crashes.

Only well qualified people are licensed to fly airplanes, whereas any and every fool can and does operate automobiles.

Automobile mechanics are for the most part improperly trained. Most learn from experience with no formal training. Commercial airplane mechanics must go through formal training before they are allowed to work on airplanes.

Moreover, airplanes are usually checked out on a daily basis to ensure that the machine is operating properly. It is probably true that every automobile on the road has a mechanical flaw in them. Most people will not bother to have their cars checked year-

ly, let alone daily.

Furthermore, automobile engineering is not as sophisticated discipline as aerial engineering. The reason is a lot of money has been poured into the aero-space program and the research findings are directly applicable to commercial flying. Hence, the most modern equipment is currently being used by airlines.

Last but not least is the density problem. There are many, many, many more cars on the roads than there are planes in the air. Consequently, there is a much greater chance of accidents occurring on the ground than in the air.

So you see, if you can afford to fly - then fly. Your chances in the air are far better than your chances are on the road.

Fear is not a rational excuse for not flying. After all of this if you still aren't convinced that you should fly then I just hope I happen to be going your way when you crank up for your next trip.

Rock Easy!