

# Editorials

## Harris Made Us Think

Sydney J. Harris, syndicated columnist and author of 11 books, died last Sunday at the age of 69. Mr. Harris is known to millions of newspapers readers, young and old, rich and poor, black and white alike, for his unique and highly interesting column, *Strictly Personal*. His column, which originated on the editorial page of the *Chicago Daily News*, was syndicated in over 200 newspapers, including *The Charlotte Observer*, throughout the U.S., Canada, and South America.

On the jacket of his book, *The Best of Sydney J. Harris*, the publishers wrote, "For more than (four) decades, Harris has been delighting and disturbing his growing band of followers with penetrating and thoughtful comments on every aspect of contemporary life - and candidly anticipating many of our current problems and perplexities."

Mr. Harris was born in London, England, in 1917 and migrated to Chicago with his parents while a mere youth. He later attended the University of Chicago where he became involved in the Great Books movement begun in the 1930s by philosopher Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins, a professor at Chicago.

"Harris," said former *Chicago Sun-Times* drama critic Herman Kogan, "was provocative, whether he did it harshly or did it gently - he could do either or both." Kogan then added what we think was the highest compliment, "I think he'd like to be remembered as someone...who made people think." Harris did just that by setting "a framework of thought that no other living journalist has dared to offer the 'average reader.'" Whether commenting on the international issues in war and peace,

probing the complexities of marriage and child-rearing in contemporary America, or focusing on the evils of racism in America or South Africa, he was always a perceptive and humane observer. In all of his essays the reader was rewarded with valuable clarifications and insights to many of the world's most complex problems and issues.

In what we consider to be one of Mr. Harris' classic columns that is certainly something to "make people think" in this approaching holiday season, he said, "If Christ returned on Christmas...would there not be soon a second crucifixion?" He says, "This time not by the Romans or the Jews, but by those who proudly call themselves Christians" Harris then starts the reader to thinking in more specific terms: Would not the militarists among us assail Him as a cowardly pacifist...the nationalists attack Him...the wealthy castigate Him...the liberals dismiss as a dreamy vagabond...the Puritans despise and reject Him...the sensual among us scorn Him...the proud and important among us laugh at Him?" Harris sums it up in these thought-provoking words, "Would not each of us in his own way find some part of this man's (Jesus') sayings and doings to be so threatening to our (selfish) ways of life, so much at odds with our rooted beliefs, that we could not tolerate Him for long?"

Mr. Harris, as you seek your place in the Heavens, we offer our thanks for having made us think, for having given us food for meaningful, life-clarifying thoughts. We feel truly honored that God allowed you to live among us in our time because our lives have been richly blessed by your presence.

Sydney J. Harris ... truly a man for all seasons.



### As I See It

## A View Of The CMCF

By Gerald O. Johnson  
Special To The Post

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Forum (CMCF) is an organization that was formed a few years ago to help resolve issues between neighborhood groups and developers. Urban Institute at UNCC was instrumental in getting the two sides together to talk to each other instead of at each other. From all indications those early meetings were successful. Rarely do we hear of irreconcilable differences between developers and neighborhoods like we did just a few years ago.

Inspired by the successes of the past, the organization is now pressing on for even greater achievements for the future. They meet annually and prepare a priorities list. This list consists of major concerns facing our community, i.e., low income housing, balanced growth, and education, just to name a few. The items on the list are voted on as to their priority and any dissenting vote will eliminate that item. We aren't talking majority rules here, folks, it's all or nothing. After formulating the final list, committees are assigned to research the concerns,



Gerald develop a recommendation, and report back to the organization. If the findings are approved by the organization, then documentation is drawn up for presentation to the proper governing body for action. The CMCF's membership list looks like a who's who of Charlotte. It consists of business leaders, community leaders, city and county elected officials, city and county employees, and educators. The organization's representation is a good cross section of Charlotte from every conceivable aspect. The agendas seemingly focus on the

primary issues concerning Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Hence, the organization is good for Charlotte. Or is it?

We must remember that the CMCF has no power or authority. They are a group of concerned citizens and elected officials putting their heads together to develop proposals that will hopefully benefit the citizenry of Mecklenburg County. But even with no power and no authority the CMCF does have tremendous influence. This influence has helped shape what Mecklenburg County is today and what it will be tomorrow. It is this influence that makes some people have apprehensions about the organization. The CMCF does not represent anyone. They speak for no one. Yet their influence can cause changes that will impact everyone. It is for this reason that several elected officials refuse to participate in the annual planning session retreats. They do not want to be influenced by the collective opinions of the CMCF.

I personally share some of the same concerns about the group's influence. However, the forum does not allow for the exchange of ideas and opinions on issues facing Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. It is one of the few places that I have heard all sides of issues presented in a non-hostile environment. Enough of the right people are involved to get answers about technical situations. A City Councilwoman put it best by saying she was elected to represent her precinct. The forums give her the opportunity to have dialogue on the issues and to get a clearer understanding of those issues. Then she must use her judgment to vote on the issues. When her judgment gets out of line with her precinct's desires then they will vote her out of office. I concur.

The CMCF can only bring proposals to the City Council, County Commission, and School Board meetings, just like you and I. It is our responsibility as non CMCF members to scrutinize their proposals for our best interest. This simply means getting involved with those things that will affect our lives. It means staying abreast of issues appearing as agenda items at the various public meetings. If you disagree with a CMCF proposal or any other proposal for that matter, then you have the right to be heard. Consequently, the CMCF or anybody else cannot lead us where we don't want to be led.

## The Racial Learning Group

Among the numerous problems and challenges facing American public education today is the continuing educational achievement gap between most, but not all, black and white children. While many school systems are strongly committed to and are using financial and other resources to close this gap, the question has been raised as to whether such efforts will succeed. The basic question arises in part from some belief that there may be some contributing factors to the learning-achievement gap that has not been included in the gap reducing equation.

We were reminded of this again when a William Raspberry column introduced us to Janice Hole-Benson's book, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles*. While admitting that she does not have any final answers, Ms. Benson says she seeks "to stimulate a different conversation and... a different research orientation toward the education of black children."

Benson offers two assumptions that she hopes will influence this different research orientation. "One is that whatever their cultural differences, black children must achieve competency in mastering the tools of their culture if they are to survive."

However, the meaning of the term "culture" in this first assumption became somewhat blurred with Ms. Benson's second assumption "that there survives in melting-pot America a distinct African-rooted black culture whose neglect by educators steep in the European traditions predisposes black youngsters to academic under-achievement."

Evidence to support Ms. Benson's second assumption can be seen in the number of higher achiever African and Asian students in America who have brought their cultural roots with them to study in America. However, the hard, realistic fact is that American blacks have a long history of blurred cultural roots arising from the institution of slavery, Jim Crowism, and our failure to respond to the efforts of traditionally black colleges to nurture such roots until the civil rights era of the 1960s. However, black low achievement is first and foremost a result of education not being truly a deeply rooted value among black Americans as it is among the American Jewish community. Research is fine but until black values about education change for the better, the learning-achieving gap will forever exist.

### Miller Says:

## A Redistribution Of Wealth Has Occurred

By Sherman N. Miller  
Special To The Post  
McDonald's golden arches are rapidly losing their glitter. They have become the scapegoat for low paying jobs associated with the fast food industry. McDonald's has the dubious honor of being tagged with a new "McJob" classification which has displaced America's minimum wage as the base line for measuring socioeconomic progress.

As I listened to a black leader rant and rail on television over the deleterious impact of McJobs on the economy of the black community, I was convinced that the McJobs concept was highly charged. Furthermore, I have heard mainstream business people vent their frustration over pending industrial sector plant closings with comments like, "McDonald's people buy only used cars."

I sense concern about the destruction of the middle class and the collapse of the U.S. economy from downward price pressure on over-priced products in my discussions of McJobs. Yet Dr. Richard L. Leshner, president of Chamber of



Sherman

Commerce of the U.S., points out of the foolhardiness in the disappearance of the middle class.

"History teaches that any society polarized between rich and poor is ripe for destabilization," writes Leshner in the November 10 issues of *The Voice of Business*.

Leshner also attempted to remove the taint from McJobs. "In the relatively low-paying service sector, the so-called 'McJobs' grew only 7.8 percent and contributed only 10 percent of the new jobs," reports Leshner. "As a matter of fact, the

percentage of workers in this category actually has declined significantly."

But a brief look at the distribution of income levels for families from 1960-83 in terms of constant 1983 dollars indicates that a redistribution of wealth has occurred. In 1960 the percentage of families with incomes over \$20,000 was 41.7 percent. By 1983 it had risen to 60.6 percent.

Overlaying the emotions expressed in adverse McJobs comments onto the above income statistics suggest that the existence of an intra-middle class salary realignment. These worries allude to the evolution of a new wage distribution profile premised on one's job skills being valued by world market standards.

Automobile assembly workers have begun to realize the value of their skills on the open market. Some automobile workers admit they would not be able to land a comparable salary if their present plants were to close. Many semi-skilled persons are also encountering similar downward valu-

ation of their skills following plant closings.

Yet Leshner attempts to assuage these fears. "The top third of occupations, rated by weekly earnings, rose from 27.7 percent to 29 percent of all jobs," reveals Leshner, "the middle increased from 28.9 percent to 33.4 percent and the bottom tier decreased from 43.8 percent to 37.6 percent."

As I grapple with the worries expressed by blue collar industrial workers, I am concerned for the long-term viability of the U.S. economy. I fear the rapid decimation of too many industrial sector, high paying, blue collar jobs in the short-run will cause a depression. Namely, consumers will delay purchasing big ticket items hoping for significant price drops, thereby forcing inventories up and accelerating the closure of marginally profitable plants.

I do hope the President and the new Congress develop programs to save America's manufacturing base and not merely abdicate our high paying industrial sector jobs to foreign nations.

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Published Every Thursday by The Charlotte Post Publishing Company, Inc. Main Office: 1531 S. Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203
Second Class Postage Paid at Charlotte
Member, National Newspaper Publishers' Association North Carolina Black Publishers Association
National Advertising Representative: Amalgamated Publishers, Inc.
One Year Subscription Rate One Year - \$17.76 Payable In Advance
USPS No. 965500 POSTMASTER Send Change of address to Charlotte Post 1531 Camden Rd. Charlotte, N.C. 28203