

Editorials

The Charlotte Post

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On Writing And Writers

Over the past few months, journalists have had much to say about writing and writers, no doubt including themselves. Shortly before his death, syndicated columnist Sydney Harris wrote that a writer loses his audience when he flexes his ego. Harris used Herman Wouk's recent novel, *Inside, Outside*, to illustrate his point. "Wouk (in his book) seems to take himself and his career far more seriously than he takes his work," Harris wrote. "This is largely an autobiographical novel, the most dangerous kind to write." Harris concludes by saying in the book, "Wouk flexes his ego on his connections with the (Richard) Nixon White House.

Charlotte Observer columnist James Olsen sought recently to remind us of something that most of us already know, textbook publishers are only interested in sales and profits, not values. Olsen notes that publishers "don't want controversy... (thus) guarantees historical amnesia for our children... If textbooks are biased, it's in the direction of pleasing everyone and making everyone depicted look good," which doesn't usually reflect real life situations.

Olsen writes that our textbooks avoid any "sign of poverty, violence, social discord, family conflict, crime... or anything that might generate the least bit of controversy." To have such would offend some groups and possibly result in lost sales. Karen Smythers, a graduating senior at Charlotte's Independence High School and an Observer editorial intern, reminds us adults to not blame books for teenagers' mistakes. In a well written article, she concludes, "Give us (high school students) a strong background so that even controversial books can provide an academic springboard for reflection on moral choices."

Finally, Washington Post columnist William Raspberry takes a cue from Ray Peter Clark's new book, *Free To Write*, to focus our attention on another aspect or deterrent to good writing. Raspberry tells us quite truthfully that children are given the impression that writing is a form of punishment because teachers highlight "in flaming red ink" everything that's negative or incorrect. The results, Raspberry adds, is "children no longer feel free to write, but rather seek only to please the teacher in very superficial ways.

Ask Right Questions

These three perspectives on writing each shows a serious flaw in the work of so-called professional writers. Wouk sought to make himself the centerpiece of his writing. The textbook publishers seek to avoid controversy for the presumed assumption of satisfying everyone. Yet, young Karen Smythers said without the opportunity for "reflection on moral choices" we cannot grow intellectually. Such publishers need to heed Karen's point. Likewise, they should watch Ted Koppel's *Nightline* television show to observe how he skillfully makes thought-provoking statements and asks the right questions to draw opposing view responses from his guests. This often results in controversy and conflict, but it helps the viewer/listener to do his

own independent thinking and to draw his/her own conclusions. This is what textbooks are supposed to do.

Then, too, the manner in which we inhibit our young people's interest and freedom to write can make bright, alert minds dull and, subsequently, produce a generation of equally dull, uninspired writers.

We journalists tend sometimes to make these same kinds of non-productive mistakes. A case in point is how many newspaper writers have tried to ignore Jesse Jackson as a serious and important presidential candidate. As the Observer's Jerry Shinn wrote candidly last month that with "Gary Hart's withdrawal from the presidential campaign the Democrats must confront an embarrassing truth: They don't take Jesse Jackson seriously as a presidential candidate...because they don't think a black man can win the presidency in 1988."

Media Ignores Jesse

Journalists, like the textbook publishers, apparently want to accommodate the Democrats by ignoring Jackson. Again, Shinn candidly wrote, "If Jesse Jackson were white, all the media focus would have turned to him when Hart dropped out." Is it racism by the Democrats and or the media or both that might possibly deny the voters the opportunity to maybe vote for or against Jesse Jackson?

Furthermore, it's one thing to not believe Jackson can win the Democratic Party nomination, much less be elected. But it's sheer stupidity to ignore and not listen to what Jesse Jackson has to say. Ted Koppel is quoted in *Newsweek* as saying, "I listen. Most people don't. Something interesting comes along and - whoosh! - it goes right past them." It is for this reason that *Newsweek* says that "Koppel is on a roll - making headlines, shaping issues."

Two writers who apparently listen intently to Jesse Jackson are syndicated columnist Joseph Sobran and David Broder, author and Washington Post reporter. Sobran says bluntly, Jackson has star quality, he knows how to use it (therefore), he could tear the (Democratic) party to shreds if there is a concerted attempt to so shut him out of the ticket." Even more to the point, Broder is one of the few white writers to attempt to really listen to what Jackson has to say.

Broder is one of the few to admit that "With the change in Jackson's status, we must change the way we report him (and not ignore him)...We have paid too little attention to what Jackson is actually saying. Ultimately, like all the other contenders, he will (or should) be judged by his personal qualities and his record, as well as his ideas."

Broder listened, as many others both white and black have failed to do, when Jackson says that the crucial American experience was not the Revolutionary War or the Constitution of New Deal. It was slavery. Thus, "the crucial test," in Broder's words, "of our current values and policies, he (Jackson) asserts repeatedly, lies in dealing with the heritage of slavery - discrimination and racism."

Next week: Jesse Jackson's beliefs.

Defects Of The Constitution

Special To The Post
By Benjamin Chavis

He is like the old soldier who has fought many a war and is now coming back for one more, necessary battle. Such is the image of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, a man who, in the sunset of his years, has shown that plain, outspoken courage is not just the purview of the young.

The Reagan Administration had hoped to use the Constitution's bicentennial to enshrine and therefore to stagnate that document. The Constitution, thus deified, was to become yet another tool in Reagan's attempt to illegitimize the Progressive gains made before Reagan took office. But this was not to be. Justice Marshall, the lone African American on the highest bench in the land, saw to that. While President Reagan and his cohort, former Chief Justice Warren Burger, praised the Constitution as a perfect document and its framers as "giants," Thurgood Marshall brought a little reality to the situation.

In a recent speech Justice Mar-

shall noted that he did not "find the wisdom, foresight and sense of justice exhibited by the Framers particularly profound." To the contrary," he added, "the government they devised was defective from the start... When contemporary Americans cite 'The Constitution,' they invoke a concept that is vastly different from what the Framers barely began to construct two centuries ago." One of the defects to which Marshall was referring was the matter of slavery, a subject which Reagan carefully omits in his speeches. And so he must. For by discussing the imperfections of the Constitution, Reagan would also have to admit that a strict interpretation of the Constitution would put African Americans back in chains. As Justice Marshall reminds us, "Moral Principles against slavery, for those who had them were compromised."

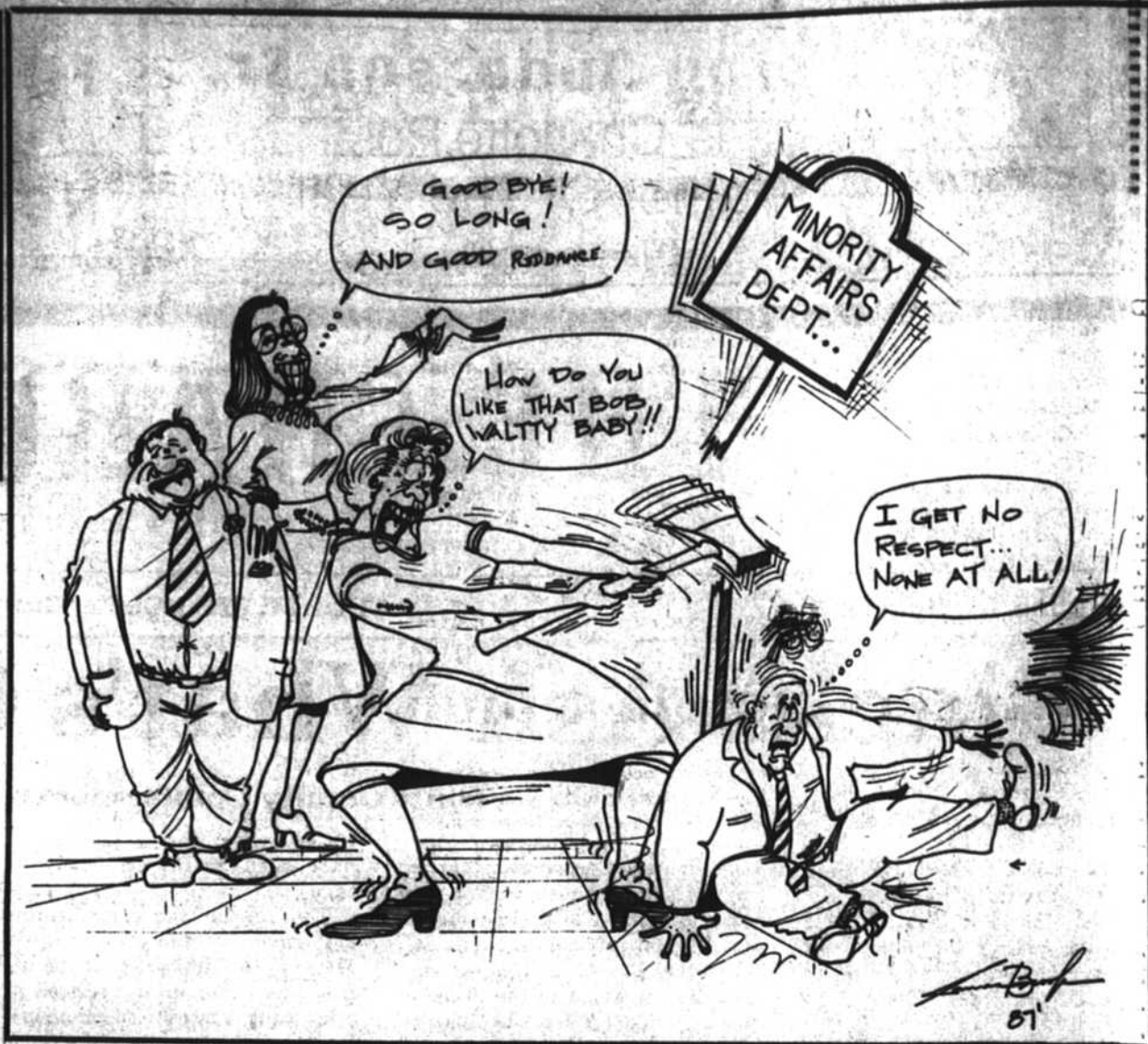
One of the reasons this country has never been fully exorcised of its racism is that it never truly admitted the racist underpinning upon which this country was built.

You cannot repair a wrong until

you have admitted it. By revealing the flaws in the lofty, yet imperfect, Constitution, Justice Marshall has validated the continuing struggle for change that will make that document truly democratic. As he himself notes, the credit for progressive change in this country "...does not belong to the Framers. It belongs to those who refused to acquiesce in outdated notions of 'liberty,' 'justice,' and 'equality,' and who strived to better them... [T]he true miracle was not the birth of the Constitution, but its life, a life nurtured through two turbulent centuries of our own making."

Justice Marshall has reminded us that the rights of the oppressed should never be sacrificed for the so-called greater good of maintaining order or political cohesion. This country has yet to repent for slavery and until it does, we will continue to reap harvest after harvest of racial turmoil.

We salute Thurgood Marshall for his valiant continued efforts towards the cause of justice for all People.



Minority Affairs Office Cut Not Political?

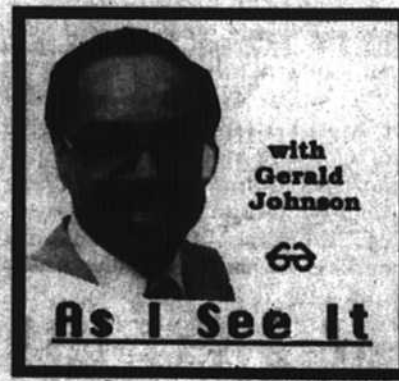
The County Commissioners spent last week blowing the smoke from their six shooters as the budget-fight at the 'O.K. County of Mecklenburg building' reached its final stages. As usual the Commissioners and the County manager walk away unscathed. They holstered their sharpened pencils and slowly walked away from the battle scene.

Left bleeding in the streets were those programs that were not fortunate enough to know when to fight and when to run. Most lie bleeding, helplessly, awaiting their time to die.

One program that was being gunned for was the Minority Affairs office. Many people in this here ole town felt that the Minority Affairs office was vulnerable because it was a way for the Commissioners to get back at one of their own - cowboy Bob.

Cowboy Bob has always been the black sheep of the Commissioners, and some say they were out to get him. They say ole Bob can continue to ride wit'em, but he ain't gonna get no real bullets. They are gonna see to it that he only shoot blanks. The Minority Affairs office was one of cowboy Bob's side-kicks. Cowboy Bob was instrumental in getting the program started. Cowboy Bob tried to help save the Minority Affairs office, by turning his weapon on the rest of the gang. But Bob's weapon only shot blanks. Minority Affairs was gunned down.

As I sit here in my ole rocker, observing the goings on of



this ole town, the gunfight leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. The fight was unfair. The Minority Affairs office was not armed.

The Commissioners said the purpose of the office was questionable and the office duplicated the efforts of other offices. This point I can't argue. But the same statement can be said about most County offices.

The Commissioners further said that the Minority Affairs office duplicated the work of the Community Relations Committee and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Women's Commission.

This statement implies that there is duplication of effort between the Women's Commission and the Community Relations Committee. If this is the case, then consolidating all of these functions into one office would be appropriate.

The Commissioners were quoted as saying 'the mission of the office was vague and the details of its work sketchy'. I find this statement hard to believe. I serve on County Boards that oversee various county offices. I have yet to find one with a clear missions statement.

Government spending is subject very near and dear to my heart. Fiscal responsibility is often preached, but rarely practiced by governing bodies. Therefore, I am for any cutbacks that are responsible and not political.

The cutting of the Minority Affairs office appears to be political. Again, the reasons for cutting it could easily apply to several dozen offices

that did not get cut. Moreover, an office operating on a shoestring budget can only yield shoestring results. What were the expectations of this office, anyway?

If in fact the Commissioners were acting out of fiscal responsibility and were not politically motivated, then cut out all the waste. It is difficult for me to see fiscal responsibility as the objective when the approved budget ends up higher than the proposed budget.

Fiscal responsibility could not have been the order of business when programs got cut, but commissioners salaries got raised.

It would have been more appropriate to appoint a citizens committee to review the Minority Affairs office. The committee could have reviewed the good the office had done, the potential good the office could do, and if there was any benefit in maintaining the office.

The approached used to rid us of the Minority Affairs office has the Black community arming itself for the next gunfight. They are calling it 'showdown at the polls'.

Prosperity Belongs To HistoryMakers

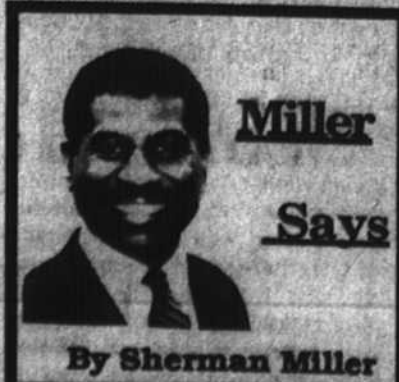
Paring down America's corporate employment roles is forcing a re-definition of productivity. It is rapidly evolving into a measure of an individual's smart work and its timeliness in gaining market advantage in our global marketplace. Thus, to remain competitive in the late 1980s and the early 2990s, American business persons will have to take the office on the road.

Yet some businessmen must overcome ego-blindness to reap the benefits of America's modern technology. For example, typing one's own reports on a computer does not imply that one is a secretary. Typing skills offer the opportunity to personally tailor one's reports and studies or use electronic mail and databases.

But the real issue is, "How does one take the office on the road?" Some people use telephone message systems, but laptop computers are the best long-term way to transmit information from the road. Electronic reports possess comparable respect to the proverbial hard-copy.

Nevertheless, laptop computers should have:

• A screen that is readable in poor lighting conditions such as airport waiting lounges, on airplanes, and in hotel rooms. • The



capacity to run on an internal battery with a minimum of six hours' battery life. • Weight under eight pounds to avoid becoming a burden during long walks in major airports. • IBM compatibility, with 640 Kilo-bytes of Random Access Memory or greater, to run your favorite desktop programs. • An internal modem (1200 baud minimum) to quickly send messages electronically. • At least one floppy disk drive to avoid the loss of data from the computer's jamming. • Small enough size to fit on airplane serving trays to permit work while airborne.

Even though you have a laptop computer that meets the above requirements, you can still pull your hair out trying to get a hotel room

telephone to cooperate. Here are some tips to insure that you access your corporation's mainframe computer:

• Alert the hotel registrars that you have a laptop computer so they will place you in a room with a telephone configured to handle electronic communication. A Holiday Inn registrar in Decatur, AL, apprised me that they had special telephone lines in some rooms for business travellers with computers. This was a welcomed relief from a near fiasco at 2 a.m. in a McCook, NE, hotel where I was scurrying to find a telephone to transmit some very important data. • If no special rooms exist, you should request to use a telephone that has a dedicated outside line; i.e., one that does not require you to dial 9 to make an outside call. If your modem dials automatically, call direct (bill your room) or call an 800 number.

If America is to beat the competition in the world marketplace, the laptop computer must provide the competitive edge. In the "Information Age, decision makers must have the right information while it can still influence the course of events. Thus, prosperity belongs to the history makers and not in those content to reminisce.