

The Charlotte Post

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Editorials

A Sense Of Powerlessness?

By HOYLE H. MARTIN
Editorial Writer

"The (public) schools have failed to provide the educational experiences which could help overcome the effects of (racial) discrimination and deprivation," concluded the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder*. The report was published in 1968, following the urban riots of the summer of 1967.

Subsequently, more public funds were made available to many so-called inner city or predominantly black schools.

However, parents and leaders of the nation's black communities became increasingly aware that few meaningful changes in the education of their children were occurring. At the same time, they realized that they had been systematically excluded and cut off from the centers of power where school policy decisions were made.

The latter phenomenon was confirmed in an unpublished manuscript by Robert Hess and Virginia Shipman entitled, "Maternal Attitudes Toward the Schools and the Role of the Pupil." They found that "working class (black) mothers feel a powerlessness and a lack of personal effectiveness against the authority of the school system, although they have a great respect for education as an important tool for achieving a better status in life" for their children.

Furthermore, a *Journal of Social Issues* article published in 1964 reported that in every socioeconomic class, black parents have (very high) educational aspirations for their children...

Therefore, contrary to popular belief, the problems affecting black children in education is not apathy by black parents toward education, but rather their perceived lack of power to influence what, how and where black children are taught.

Significantly, the current conflict between the powers that be --- the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board and their school administrations --- with the racially integrated Chantilly neighborhood over retaining its school as an integrated neighborhood school as opposed to making it a midway integrated school, with the loss of its neighborhood student population, is an example of the problem of the sense of powerlessness that people feel.

Recognizing that powers in society have placed on the public schools the responsibility for being one of the few institutions to reflect meaningful integration, it is not surprising that the school board chose to use its powers in a quest to promote and maintain a county-wide integrated school system.

Unfortunately, the school board failed to share its power with the people who elected them by including neighborhood-based, racially integrated schools in their county-wide school integration plans. Thus, it has been only by the collective countervailing power of the Chantilly neighborhood that the school board has agreed to fully reconsider its midway school concept and plan.

Ironically, and in spite of the experience of the Chantilly neighborhood and undoubtedly numerous other successful challenges to the power structure in communities across the nation, many people in all racial groups feel a sense of powerlessness. Polls show that 60 percent of the nation's adult population feel alienated from the power structure. By "power structure" we mean the institutional forces of government at all levels, the corporate community, and the news media, espe-

cially television.

As a result of the Reagan administration's tax policies and its callous attitudes toward minorities and the poor, a Louts Harris poll shows that 81 percent of the general public believe that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." Sixty-six percent of the public feels that "most people with power try to take advantage of the people like themselves."

For example, the federal Food and Drug Administration had failed to warn the public about the cancer-causing pesticide in apples, the airline industry failed to provide information to the general public about their aging airplanes, and there exists questionable statements made by the public utilities about the safety of their nuclear power facilities. Then, too, there is the consideration by the Bush administration to have the tax payers pay for the megabuck losses of the nation's sagging Savings and Loan industry ravaged in part by poor management and corruption.

Not too surprisingly, 71 percent of Afro-Americans have expressed feelings of powerlessness. Harris says, "this phenomenon is deep-seated in modern American society... part of the reason is in the complex structure that puts so many layers between the establishment leadership and the ...public. The persistence of this feeling of powerlessness by the majority of the population, now in its second decade, is profoundly disturbing for the country."

Along with the existing "quiet riots" in our urban centers that may be approaching a state of noisy destruction, our nation is indeed in serious trouble. Harris concludes, "the price that might be paid if the alienation (the powerlessness) ever became openly hostile could be enormous...(and) traumatic."

Possibly there is some real hope in the somewhat paradoxical fact that as a nation our perceived powerlessness is at least partly of our own doing as citizens. In this regard it is shameful to report that only 25 percent of the parents of school aged children visit their children's school on any regular basis for any meaningful reason. This was a concern coming from the voices of the 8,000 principals, deputies and assistants attending the National Association of Secondary School Principals' annual meeting in New Orleans last month. They said among other things that:

- The more parents get involved, the better their children will read, count, spell and score better on achievement tests.

- We need to remind parents that it's their responsibility to show an interest in their children's home work, to be aware of what's going on in the school, to find out why "Johnny can't read," and to restrict television time to assure adequate study hours.

- If I could change one thing, I would prohibit any parent from saying to a child: "I never could understand algebra so don't worry about it."

- A positive learning environment at home and high parental expectations can make the difference between an excellent and a mediocre student.

These thoughts should be enough to let us know that all is not lost, that our sense of powerlessness can to some degree be overcome. Living in the world's greatest democracy should remind us too that the freedoms we have can only be maintained to the degree that we assume a sense of responsibility. Thus, some aggressive action on our part as citizens may be all that is needed to reverse a now troubling sense of powerlessness.

Concern For All Of Our Children

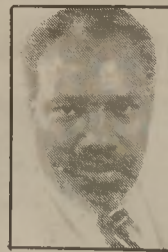
The following is a statement to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board by Dr. Clifford A. Jones Sr., pastor of Friendship Baptist Church.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Board, Dr. Relic and staff; thank you for this opportunity to share concern for a continued commitment for equal, equitable desegregated schools for Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

We have, of course, strange divisions here over this very delicate and sensitive issue --- continued commitment to equality and equity of education for all of our children, not nameless students --- strange, yet familiar divisions here; that of education, that of wealth, that of the object of life, that of created emotionalism, that of culture, that of ethnocentrism and that of religious persuasion. Yet, we are here because of a commonality, con-

cern for our children, not nameless students, but our children.

This concern for our children must transcend "My community, My neighborhood, and My choice." If it is reduced to whimsical individualism, shrouded in semantical bigotry, then the wholistic destiny of equitable education becomes a political basketball game and our children are the losers. Rhetoric de-legitimizes intent whenever "My neighborhood, My territory and My boundaries are tantamount." At some point Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools must take precedent over "My school district, and My children"



Jones

for the students. We cannot escape particularly, however, we must discover ways to be inclusive and harness individualistic lifestyles, ideologies and situations for the benefit of our education situation.

As elected officials and staff who represent us and make and implement policy (ies), I hope you will not succumb to political expediency, nor emotional theatrics, nor a voting district, nor insensitive idiosyncrasies which change each election. **OUR CHILDREN NEED YOU, OUR LEADERS** to take a stance forthrightly for equal and equitable education, not **A** neighborhood, or **A** community, but for **OUR** community and **OUR** neighborhood, **OUR** children.

It was a wise teacher at the apex in the triad of education who said, "Insomuch as you do it to the least of these, you have done it unto me."

Try Integration Through Loan Program

GUEST EDITORIAL
By Kelly Alexander Jr.

Charlotte's integrated neighborhoods are one of the community's most important natural resources. The most public example at this moment are the parents of the Chantilly community who supported integrated schools and integrated neighborhoods. They argued with precision and persuasion that a Midway school built on the ashes of an integrated neighborhood is a mistake. The School Board should designate Chantilly as a Midway school only if the students in the immediate neighborhood are factored into the mix. **Public policy actions must support integrated neighborhoods.**

I recently wrote to a number of the city's leading financial executives and shared with them the idea of establishing a **Fair Housing Revolving Loan Fund**. The fund would have the avowed public policy goal of promoting integrated neighborhoods.

It would accomplish this by providing mortgage money with lower than average monthly payments to those families that desire to move into a neighborhood where their racial group would be in the minority. Such a fund, in my opinion, should only be used to finance the purchase of a primary residence. The rules governing the fund should also limit its use to neighborhoods that are less than 30 percent integrated.

Just as the city's Community Development Department maintains a revolving loan fund for business development which is supported by the financial community and government, I see no philosophical conflict in establishing a **Fair Housing Revolving Loan Fund** which could receive similar support.

Newsweek and other national publications have focused on the quality of life in our community as one of its most important characteristics. For over 20 years, Charlotte has conducted

an open and honest debate on the shape of its future. The fact that we do debate and discuss alternatives, then have the courage to follow up discussion with action, has also set us apart.

If you believe, as I do, that an integrated Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a desirable goal; a goal that will help stabilize our school system; enhance our national image; assist us in recruiting business and industry; in general help make this an even better place to live and raise children; then you must also believe that positive community action is desirable in support of this goal.

An important step could be a **Fair Housing Revolving Loan Fund**.

Kelly Alexander Jr. is the executive secretary for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Branch and president of the North Carolina state NAACP.

Did We Make Mistake With Tower?

This argument we have had about John Tower, what does it all mean?

It is all over now. John Tower will not be the Secretary of Defense -- and thus will not be one of the most powerful people on earth, with the capability of directing the world's strongest military force.

Instead he is a defeated, discredited, broken individual, without power or influence, and, maybe without any job at all.

The decision was a close one -- three switched votes would have changed the result. How such big differences are made by such small margins intrigues me. The separation between wonderful victory and unhappy defeat is often so slight.

Don't you remember those times in your life? How you barely missed getting a different, better job? Or being selected for some high honor or office? Or how you or your team lost an important athletic contest by the smallest margin?

Even the best things that happen to us -- almost don't. All of us can tell stories of how we almost did not meet our spouses, almost didn't get the jobs we now have, almost didn't win the prize, almost went to another church.

Close calls. All the time. It makes life seem so chancy. It makes us seem so helpless -- even though we know that there is more to it than just the luck of the draw or blind fate.

But back to Tower. This remarkable episode began as a "non partisan" proceeding, but before it was over, it was clear that it was a dogfight between the parties.



D.G. Martin

One-On-One

All but one of the Senate Republicans supported Tower.

Even those who are strongest in their condemnation of drinking and all other forms of immorality rationalized some way to overlook these problems in Tower's case. (If Tower had been the nominee of a Democratic President, do you think that he would have gotten those votes? Fat chance!)

The Democrats, with a few exceptions, all found some reason to oppose him, in spite of his experience and qualifications. (Do you think that so many would have opposed him had he been the nominee of a Democratic president? Fat chance.)

No accident here. No bipartisanship -- or non partisanship -- in the Senate, yet. Not on either side. Not in either House of Congress. It is still a two party battlefield. If you don't believe me, watch the Republicans get their revenge against House Speaker Jim Wright when the report on his ethics comes up next month.

Here at home, nobody I talk to supported Tower. From right wingers who worried about his morals and his ties to big de-

fense contractors to hard core liberals who think Mother Theresa would be too militaristic for the job, nobody told me that they wanted Tower to win.

You probably agreed with them.

But I think that you and my other friends are wrong. Tower should have been confirmed. Here is why.

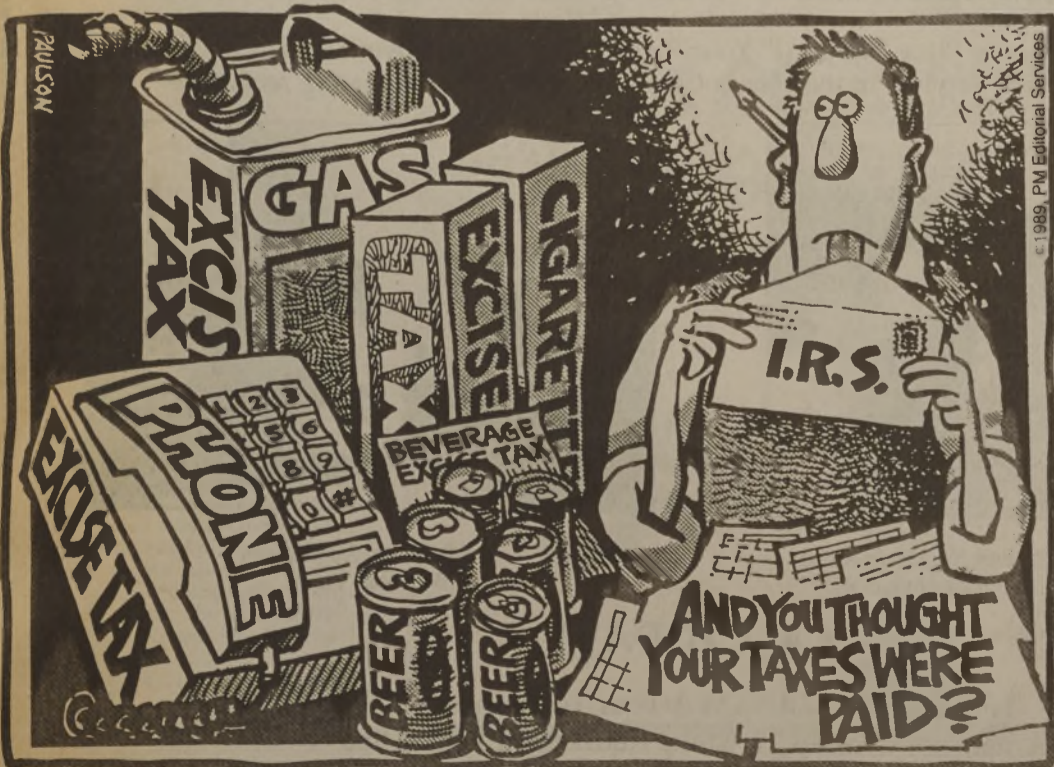
Being Secretary of Defense is as tough a job as there is in government. Is anybody qualified to do that job? Probably not. But John Tower is one of the very few people who could come close.

He knows how Congress works. He was a Senator. He knows how the Soviets think. He spent months negotiating with them.

He knows the defense establishment inside and out. He worked for defense contractors and watched them from the other side. Wouldn't he have been a lot harder to fool than someone who had stayed 100% pure and never come into contact with anyone doing business with the military?

The Defense Department is in for a new day of belt tightening and dollar stretching. It is going to take tough, mean, savvy leadership to pull that off while maintaining our country's military strength.

That monkey is on George Bush's back. And if, after reading all the FBI reports about Tower's past conduct and considering his past work for military contractors, if after all that, he still wanted John Tower to help pull it off, that is who we should have given him.



History Month To Identify With Africa

(Syracuse, N.Y.) As the 1989 Observance of Black History Month draws to a close, the last official act of the Black History Month Founder's Commission has been to formally announce the change of the designation of the Observance to **African-American History Month**.

According to Robert Starling Pritchard, Founder of Black History Month, the designation more appropriately reflects the ethnic origin of Americans of African descent in a culture-fair context. "Just as Americans of European descent refer to their national origins, it is fitting that Americans of African descent restore the ties that bind them to their continent of origin."

Dr. Pritchard went on to say, "Given the current effort amongst

people of African descent throughout the world to continue the pace of their inexorable drive towards unity after the African diaspora, the term African-American is now widely accepted. It is a descriptive term which relates to both the African descent of people-of-colour, and to the sense of nationhood and citizenship of a people who have contributed significantly to the history of the Americas for more than three centuries."

The Chairman of the Founder's Commission noted that credit for the movement towards the new designation of African-American History Month is due Ms. Barbara Banks, Publisher of the *Buffalo Challenger*, who spearheaded the national movement in favour of the change before the Rev. Jesse Jackson successfully

embraced advocacy of the designation.

Historian Benjamin Quarles said the development was "positive." "Up until the last twenty or thirty years, many Blacks did not care to identify with Africa," Dr. Quarles said. "The reversal of this trend, spearheaded by scholars, artists and musicians, is a tremendous thing. African-American is now the accepted language."

African-American History Month is the most recent development of a consciousness movement which began with Negro History Week, first conceived by Mrs. Josephine K. Bruce (1841-1910). The concept was implemented in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, Founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.