

The Charlotte Post

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EDITORIALS

Civic Index: An Agenda

By HOYLE H. MARTIN
Editorial Writer

For the past nine months, a 68-member group of volunteers called the Civic Index "stakeholders", met every three weeks interlaced with sub-group work sessions to study issues under 10 board categories and to prepare reports. Under the chairmanship of banker Ronnie Cuthbertson, the "stakeholders," true to their name, researched, debated, discussed, analyzed and compromised viewpoints in arriving at a consensus on what they perceive as the essential issues facing the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. Subsequently, and with little fanfare, the committee then went on to prepare recommendations for dealing with these issues and concerns.

Undoubtedly, there are people who are disappointed because the "stakeholders" did not chart a specific set of "do's" and "don't's" for solving the community's problems. To have such thoughts is to miss the whole purpose of the Civic Index, that is, as their brochure says, "a process designed as a subjective, self-evaluation tool which Charlotte-Mecklenburg is using to strengthen our civic infrastructure and community problem-solving capacity." Chairman Cuthbertson put the "stakeholders" efforts in perspective when he said, "these recommendations ... are not about specific issues that we all agree need to be addressed. These recommendations are to determine if we have the process in place to handle these issues."

However, if there is one possible weakness in the Civic Index's recommendations, it is, as The Charlotte Observer's Jerry Shinn noted, the passionate feelings that some of the "stakeholder" members had about particular issues that don't clearly surface in any of the recommendations. Yet, when 68 people are struggling to reflect a consensus on the feelings, frustrations, ideas and interests of a broad-based group of citizens who may or may not reflect the full range of opinions and beliefs of the 400,000 plus citizens of the community, the weakness in question should be expected.

On the positive side of the ledger, we wish to highly commend the "stakeholders" for their untiring efforts in helping the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community to put in clearer focus and perspective the issues and concerns it faces. The "stakeholders" identified seven "critical issues" and listed them in a random, non-priority order. However, we believe some priority is necessary for an orderly and timely approach to building the necessary foundation for attacking these critical issues through the proposed recommendations and their outgrowth.

The first priority should be the development of a "common vision" about the direction and future of the community. Therefore, there is a need to establish an educa-

tional and information process to inform both youth and adults alike about how they can determine the destiny of the shape and form of their living environment. In particular, they should be educated and advised as to how they can influence the kind of neighborhoods they want to live in and the upgrading of the quality life of the larger Charlotte-Mecklenburg community through taking the time to think about, study, dream dreams and seek, as the "stakeholders" state, to be involved in the development of a shared set of values (that is,) .. economic vitality, liveability, quality education for all children, a safe and crime-free environment and inclusion of all citizens in community decisions."

This all sounds good - almost too easy for developing a more livable environment. Thus, we need to pause and run up a red flag of caution. Why? Because the "stakeholders" have noted the growing sense of apathy among adults about the local electoral process, the functions of local government and the status of public school education. Such apathy was partly reflected in our editorial last week about the large number of purged voters stemming from their failure to vote during the last four years. Thus, the "stakeholders" have appropriately passed the final responsibility for determining whether their untiring efforts have been in vain and whether we, the citizens, are truly concerned about the quality of life in our communities and the region.

We can only hope and pray that the many citizens who did attend the "stakeholders" meetings and had input are a true cross section representation of the interests and concerns of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. We can only hope too that the citizens of the region will accept the challenge to get involved in the "common vision" development process in whatever form so that a strong foundation can be laid for addressing the problems that impact on all of our lives.

In summary, we believe that a consensus on a common vision in the context of defined values can serve as the foundation for objectively dealing with the six other critical issues that the "stakeholders" have identified from talks, debates and discussions with responsive citizens. We believe, too, that our region, our city and our communities can be whatever we want them to be if each of us gets involved in working to make good things happen and not merely wait and watch for others to make things happen.

Again, thanks to the Civic Index "stakeholders" for a job well done. They have done what, somehow, we could not do for ourselves, so now, let us do our part.

Are Interracial Whites Shunned?

During the heyday of racial segregation, white persons associating with black people were labeled "nigger lovers." Thus interracial relationships were a nightmare for liberal whites in Mainstream America.

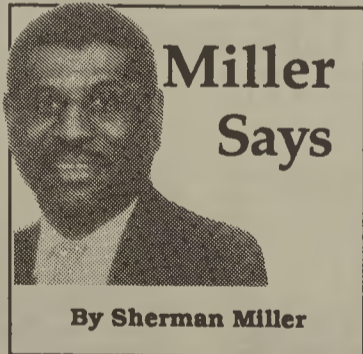
But some liberal whites ignored this upward mobility burden. These people worked in social programs targeted to the black community. A few liberal whites committed the mortal sin of marrying into black families.

There are roughly two hundred thousand black/white interracial married couples today. I guesstimate another 50,000 black/white interracial non-married relationships underway. Furthermore, competitive world market forces now demand that American businesses harness the full potential of their multiracial work-force.

The above shifts in American's modus operandi suggest that whites involved in interracial relationships have unique skills. These people know how to prosper in dual cultures.

I began to appreciate interracial whites when a white lady showed up at my home to pick up my youngest son to go to the YMCA. She claimed to be the mother of one of the black boys that is often around my house. I initially doubted her statement because the child is not a mulatto. She read the doubt in my face. She replied, she was the child's stepmother.

I invited her into my home while Sherman II got his things ready. I was reviewing some articles so we began to talk about my writings. She then surprised me, revealing that she thought of writing a proposal to the man-



By Sherman Miller

agement of her multi-national employer to work on projects significant to the black community.

This white lady expressed intimate understanding of the plight of black Americans. She attempted to give credence to her claim by revealing that she had once taught blacks mathematics at the Opportunity Industrialization Centers.

This lady's comments were very perplexing because they raised the issue of non-racial qualifications outweighing race on supposedly race related projects. I was left plagued by the issue, "Are interracial whites victims of defacto segregation in both Black and White America?" I asked a number of mainstream white people the question, "Who would get the job between a black and white person if it was to manage a program targeted to the urban black community?" I proposed that the black person grew up in a predominantly white suburban neighborhood and attended private predominantly white secondary schools and an Ivy League university.

On the other hand, the white

grew up in the black community or near it. This person was also educated at the local state college or university.

I then asked: "Should the white person get special treatment because of their interracial relationship?" "No," was the overwhelming response to my question.

There was also general agreement that mainstream treatment of the white partners in interracial relationships is a difficult issue to address. Most people were still struggling with this issue when we terminated our conversation. One fellow even asked for a few days to tumble it over in his mind.

I feel that whites who are parents of mulatto children or who have lived and worked in the heart of Black America ought to be considered assets by the black community. Black America can ill-afford to be emotionally blinded by black racism when the upward mobility of black community is at stake.

Furthermore, Corporate America should view interracial whites as a national treasure because these people can offer guidance on bridging the chasm between minority groups and Mainstream America.

I am sure I will get criticized by blacks who will argue that whites always get the leadership positions. These people will accuse me of attempting to legitimize these shunned whites.

I only ask, "If interracial whites are the parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents of black people, should Black America not show empathy and sympathy for their plight?"

The Mayor Is Marching On

What is this, the sound and rumour? What is this that all men hear,
like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm is drawing near,
like the rolling on of ocean in the eventide of fear?
Tis the people marching on.

William Morrison 1834-1896.

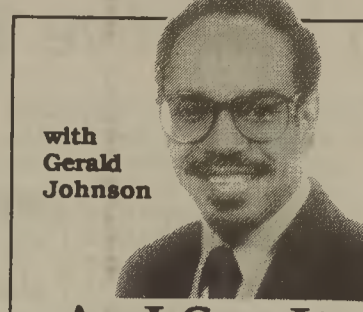
Just when things started to get boring around our town, Mayor Sue Myrick came through. Not that she intended to, mind you, things just turned out that way.

You see, the Mayor decided that a drug march was what the city needed to bring some awareness to the seriousness of the drug problem in Charlotte. So, she planned a march centered in the westside of town. The march route starts in Fairview Homes, goes close to Earle Village, and ends up near Piedmont Courts.

I would think the Mayor reasoned that the reported drug problems centered around public housing projects made these areas ideal targets for community awareness.

However, the Mayor in her haste to make people aware of the drug problem, neglected to make people aware of her plans to march. Well, this didn't sit well with a lot of folk. City council members were not made aware of her plans until they were given an invitation to march. Neither were members of the community notified about plans to march until they were asked to participate.

Of course this being an election



with Gerald Johnson

As I See It

year and all, other politicians up for re-election couldn't resist the opportunity to play politics. So, they accused the Mayor of playing politics.

Since the march would do little to solve the drug problem, some black leaders felt the risk far outweighed the reward. The march would only cast a negative light by implying the drug problem is a black problem.

The whole situation even caused some heated discussion during this week's city council meeting with the Democrats siding against the Mayor and the Republicans siding with the Mayor. It was politics as usual.

Well, if you roll your pants legs up and wade through the saw-caw, you will find that this is much to do about nothing. The Mayor blundered by making a isolated decision to march. But this happens to be the Mayor's style. This isn't the first time she has operated from a vacuum and it probably won't be her last.

But she is human, and she will make mistakes. But I happen to think this was an honest mistake. I think she meant well. Is the march warranted? Our editor and our chief photographer went to see how the people of the affected neighborhoods felt about all this. Some did feel that attention to their neighborhood slows down the drug trafficking. They feel that dealers do not like public notoriety. So a march may not be totally useless.

I am having a difficult time appreciating why everyone is so upset about the black community being a target area for fighting drugs. Even though it is true that drugs are not isolated to just the black community, it is having a more devastating impact on the black community.

Drugs are single-handedly responsible for pushing the black male species to the brink of extinction. The percentage of drug addicted babies being born daffy is disproportionately higher-in the black population. The drug related crimes are concentrated in pockets of poverty, where most of the people are black.

Even though drugs are a community problem, the people least able to afford dealing with the drug ramifications are black. Hence, we should welcome any help we can get to draw attention to the problem.

This is one issue where political community pride should take a back seat to pragmatic community reality.

Small Towns Are A People Resource

"That couldn't happen if you moved every three years."

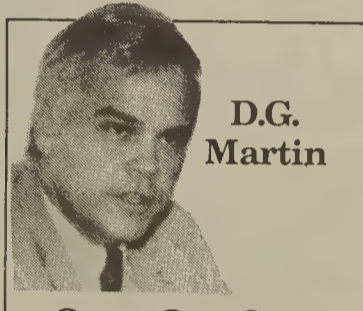
Reynolds Price, the novelist and Duke professor, was talking to a group at the Southern Writers Conference in Chapel Hill about memories.

Our memories are our treasures. They are who we are. Looking backwards some of us see our parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, cousins, long time friends, teachers, preachers, and the places we knew them-- home, church, school, stores and fields. Those people and places of growing up define us. They are our anchors. They are our foundations. They are our roots. At least they are, if we have those memories--if we remember where we grew up.

But fewer and fewer of us know where we are from. The average American moves every three years. You can't let your roots grow too deep if you move that often.

If you move every three years and live in a new neighborhood where everybody else is new, Rice says, you are not going to have the same kind of memories as those who grew up in one place.

Does it make a difference? I



D.G. Martin

One-On-One

think it does. I can't prove it, but look around at the people who are making a difference in North Carolina -- the best business leaders, our best political leaders, our best teachers and writers.

Don't a disproportionate number of them come from small towns and farms?

What explains their success in the development of leaders for the rest of us?

Some big city snobs would say that these leaders have had to overcome their culturally deprived backgrounds. Look at the small towns, they say, and see nothing happening, backward schools, no theaters, no big li-

braries, no big time sports.

Nothing there? Nothing but the stable nurturing that creates self-defining memories that Reynolds Price talks about.

North Carolina's small towns and rural communities are the state's "people estuaries."

Estuaries are those protected brackish waters along our coast, which, with the marches, swamps, and backwaters, are the most efficient producers of food in the state. They are a critical link in our food chain. We often think of those areas as underdeveloped backwaters. But they are irreplaceable treasures where the richness and stability of life makes for one of the earth's most productive ecosystems.

Reynolds Price is right. Those nurturing memories that the small towns make possible are important in giving people a sense of who they are. People who have a sense of who they are becoming our best leaders, which may explain why small towns are so successful in producing North Carolina's leaders.

They are out "people estuaries."

Blacks Must Blaze New Directions

Government policy cannot do much about teenage parenting, fatherless households and academic nonexertion -- the "crisis of the spirit" in the black community -- as Robert L. Woodson of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise terms it. That's a job the black establishment will have to undertake, at least in providing the leadership and inspiration the underclass is increasingly without.

In addition, it is up to the black leadership to blaze new directions that do not focus exclusively on discrimination. It is true that most of the ills of the underclass have their roots in racism, but it is also true that ending racism will not solve those problems.

The words of William Raspberry, Issues & Views, May/June 1987.

Help Drug-Addicted Babies Kick Habit

Guest Editorial
By Cong. Gus Hawkins

There is a saying, "when the child is safe, everybody is safe." But today, in an ever changing and complicated world, we are experiencing the harsh reality of a perilous environment for too many of our children. These conditions are evidenced in the growing number of homeless families; the children traumatized by crime-ridden neighborhoods; and the scores of youth who suffer from inadequate diets, health care, and education.

The latest reality, however, is marked by the growing number of infants born each year after exposure to cocaine and other drugs during their mother's pregnancy. Statistical evidence indicates that drug addicted babies account for an estimated 11 percent of all births. Almost 400,000 may be born "hooked" and harmed by prenatal drug exposure this year alone.

The risk to these drug-exposed infants is indeed alarming. These babies may suffer from withdrawal, irritability, loss of sleep, and increased muscle rigidity, and a condition similar to kids who have suffered brain damage. Additionally, these infants are more likely to be born prematurely and have low birth weight, which raises the risk of infant mortality and childhood

disability.

In their school age years more problems surface, such as exhibiting extreme mood swings, demonstrating excessive anger and hostility, hyperactivity, concentration difficulties, impaired speech patterns, withdrawal and/or regressive behavior, and a number of other negative emotional characteristics. These children need so much educational attention they are characterized as "high risk" students, differentiated from the commonly used "at risk" student, by denoting a young person who is academically behind.

A few months ago I visited an elementary school in Los Angeles which had a number of "high risk" children. It was evident that the educational effort, which is largely a remedial activity directed at the "high risk" student, was difficult because of their behavior and attention difficulties.

An innovative program was presented before a Congressional committee earlier this year by Carol K. Cole, a child development specialist/teacher. She submitted testimony on behalf of the Los Angeles Unified School District and teaches in a pilot program for children ages 3-6, who have been prenatally exposed to drugs. The purpose of the pilot program is to provide services to pre-school age

children who are competent thinkers, but are defined as high risk because of prenatal exposure to drugs. Supportive services are provided such as a part-time psychologist, social worker, nurse and pediatrician, speech and language therapist and other specialized services.

The problem, similar to so many other pressing social issues, is that there are not enough good programs to meet the need of eligible people. The obvious solution is to prevent pregnant mothers, or anybody, from using drugs and abusing alcohol to begin with. We can begin this task through effective drug education programs, to cut down the demand. We must also increase the available number of drug rehabilitation treatment slots in our nation's public health facilities. Drug rehabilitation should not just be a luxury for the wealthy.

And while we must direct a strong effort toward preventing drug and alcohol abuse, we must have a plan to help these vulnerable victims who are born "hooked". Surely a nation which is now celebrating the 20th anniversary of its remarkable conquest of the moon has the knowledge and resources to address this critical issue of assisting drug-addicted babies.