

State of Black Charlotte: Uncertain

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of the Medicaid program at the Mecklenburg Department of Social Services.

The infant mortality rate fell to 11.3 per 1,000 births in 1990.

"They made all pregnant women eligible for Medicaid and also all babies through the first year of life," Cook said. "These are things the state has done to increase the numbers of people eligible . . . to deal with critical needs for children and women."

Other health issues continue, including the high incidence of prostate cancer among black males and the continued plague of hypertension, heart disease and stroke cases.

And, there is the escalating incidence of AIDS among minorities, particularly heterosexual women.

Minorities make up more than 50% of active AIDS cases in Mecklenburg, according to Dr. Melvin Pinn of the Neighborhood Health Center on Alexander Street near uptown.

Pinn said the health problems of African Americans have not changed, with the exception of the increase in AIDS cases.

Some problems arise because black men don't visit doctors regularly, waiting until a condition reaches a

crisis. This is particularly the case with prostate cancer, since most men avoid the rectal examination, Pinn said.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases, or STDs, remain a problem, particularly among teenagers, according to officials at the C.W. Williams Health Center on Wilkinson Boulevard.

Of 892 visits by teenagers in 1992, 172 involved an STD, officials said. The center is also treating 60 HIV-positive cases.

Housing

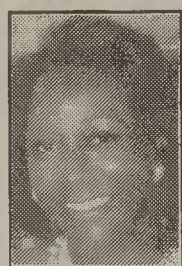
While 83% of whites own their own homes, only 16% of blacks own theirs. Much of the rental housing in inner city communities are rundown eyesores. Little housing for low-income families is being built, despite efforts by Habitat for Humanity and the Charlotte Housing Project.

More than 4,000 families usually await affordable housing through the Charlotte Housing Authority.

On an average night at the Salvation Army's women's shelter, 65 women and children will find a respite from the street or domestic violence. Some 67% of them will be black.

At the George Shinn Homeless Shelter for Men, blacks occupied 82% of the 164 beds on Oct. 6, a typical night. In 1992, 65% of the shelter's residents were black, while 30% were white, according to shelter director Frank Manville.

Manville said substance



Fails

What to do?

Madine Fails, director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League, looked over the horrific statistics with a deep sigh.

"People will tell you poverty is not the only reason for all these problems we have in the community," she said, alluding to violent behavior. "I'm not being apologetic for people doing things they shouldn't do, but unemployment and underemployment remain a real issue in the black community."

Fails said that even applicants for the Urban League's jobs training program sometimes do not have basic skills to qualify for training, let alone jobs.

That indicates the problems begin much earlier, within the school system, Fails said. Some applicants with high school diplomas do not qualify, she said.

Any recount of the nagging problems facing the African American community tugs at the hearts and souls of many middle-class blacks who have attained success.

From their offices in up-

town's towers or the doorways of their own businesses, these African Americans watch and wonder what can be done to lift their brothers and sisters out of the river's waters.

The answers do not come easily or cheaply.

But until the cry for a crackdown on crime is as loud as the cry for justice and for cures to social and economic ills, no answer is likely to be found.

"The community has got to find ways to bring these people into the job market," Fails said.

"Many of the social and economic problems are caused by or result from unemployment and underemployment, a lack of marketable skills and training."

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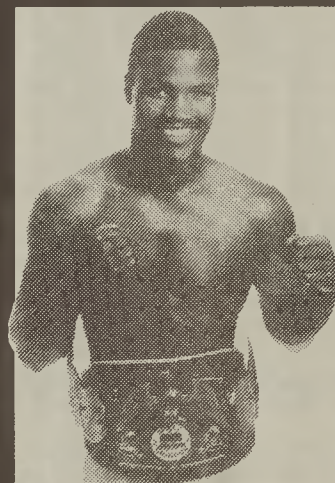


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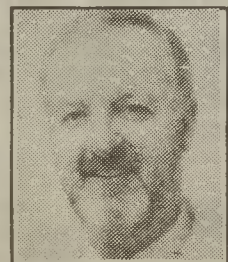


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Winning moment



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Charlotte city council member Ella Scarborough (left) and Linda Long celebrate election results Tuesday after Scarborough won an at-large bid to the board. Scarborough, a Democrat, is the first African American to win a citywide election since Harvey Gantt in 1985.

Scarborough built coalitions to win seat

Only Democrat elected at-large

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Party. She formed coalitions with the black community, the Republicans and Democrats."

Davis said that the political climate is similar to poli-



Davis

tics nationwide. "The Republicans dominated across the nation. The president hasn't gained the respect he should

have."

The focus in Charlotte, said Davis is on business. "There is little feeling for the oppressed and downtrodden. Ella's win on council is a gain. She has to use the same kind of skills for forming coalitions to get her programs carried out. She has to keep the coalitions going."

King's first son makes his own mark

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national movement for racial equality, earned a doctorate and kept huge audiences at rapt attention with his resonant preacher's voice.

The younger King has a soft-spoken, modest manner. He earned a bachelor's degree at Morehouse College in Atlanta and lists "professional speaker" as his occupation. On the commission, he prefers consensus-building to taking charge.

King has wanted to serve since working as a page for Sen. Edward Kennedy when he was 16. Still, he has struggled to find his niche.

"He's only 35," said Joseph Lowery, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference founded by the elder King. "I think he's being very

wise taking his time and feeling his way and learning from the ground up."

The high-tech nature of today's campaigns doesn't jibe with King's easygoing manner: He has been known to silently nod answers during a live radio broadcast and prefers long, drawn-out responses to catchy sound-bites.

King's proudest political moment came this summer, when he held up a deal to build the 1996 Olympics stadium until the Atlanta Braves agreed to reduce the amount taxpayers will have to pay for renovations after the Games are over.

"I think that was the new birth of political independence that he needed," Lowery said. "He seized that moment to become Martin King

the Third and not the son of Martin Luther King Junior. He came into his own."

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