

The Charlotte Post

Published weekly by the Charlotte Post Publishing Co.
1531 Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203

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Product of faith and strong family values

Marian Wright Edelman

I want to take time in this column to thank Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor for the wisdom he shares with us in his new book, "The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African American Faith."

I was deeply moved by this book, as I always am by Sam Proctor, because his writings and sermons ground me with his realism and awe me with his infinite optimism and faith.

Sam says that he, like millions of black Americans, is "heir to the faith that was born the day 20 black captives were unloaded at Jamestown in 1619. Their slow, courageous journey from the Dutch slave boat to the present, in the face of unrelenting oppression, is the story of their faith."

That faith, he says, is what gave them the strength to endure physical bondage, and the power to prevail against evil and maintain the vision of a better day. It is his own family's experience up from slavery, he says, that makes the vision clear for him today.

His father's mother and his mother's grandfather were born enslaved, physically but not spiritually or mentally. His grandmother was still alive in 1955 when he became a college president. As a child, it was difficult for Sam to see how his proud, intelligent grandmother ever could have been someone's property. He and his five brothers and sisters grew up in a strictly divided South during the Great Depression, riding segregated cars on trains, eating in segregated dining rooms, and using segregated bathrooms, all designed to diminish their sense of worth.

But his grandmother's pride and high expectations instilled in them a quest for excellence. Every one of them earned graduate degrees. His sister became a teacher, and his four brothers include an Air Force bandmaster, a dentist, a postal clerk, and an ophthalmologist. Sam's varied accomplishments could never fit on one page. He succeeded Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., as minister of Abyssinian Baptist Church of Harlem, and became a friend and advisor to many whose names will ring through history, including Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers and Jesse Jackson. He served in the Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter administrations, worked in the Peace Corps when it was changing the world and in the Office of Economic Opportunity when it was changing our country. He earned his doctorate of theology from Boston University, and became president of two colleges - his alma mater, Virginia Union and North Carolina A&T University.

Like so many black children, Sam was blessed with a loving and affirming family, neighbors and teachers, whose message was clear: You are called of God. Pride and self-respect, he says, "derive from the spiritual core within," and there is a need within every man and woman "for a strong religious faith and a world view that holds things together. If you believe that there is a purpose and a power available to each of us, you have an inexhaustible source of evergreen inspiration."

In his book, Sam calls upon us to address "questions of our purpose and destiny" and presents us with the vision of a new model of love - respect for one another in a world without poverty, hunger, and hatred. He warns that "the crisis is upon us." Violence and hopelessness spiral together. Families disintegrate or never existed to begin with. Drugs and prisons are the future for so many of our children. Children, who should be dreaming of careers and homes and families of their own, are planning what to wear at their funerals.

He says it is unacceptable when countless children, families, and communities are struggling to make it while some members of Congress propose radical, regressive, unfair, and anti-child provisions, which leave millions more children destitute, hungry, and homeless.

As our society struggles to find solutions to poverty and violence, Sam reminds that "we must reach back and find ways to help others" who are "mired in poverty, alcoholism, violence, and immorality ... or the whole American nation may sink. This is the new tenet of our faith."

We must be inspired to remember our faith and to fight for our children's families, education, just treatment under the laws of the land, and strong morals that are lived and not just preached. The Substance of Things Hoped For is published by G.P. Putnam's Sons, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

Bennettsville, S. C. native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president of the Children's Defense Fund, and a leader of the Black Community Crusade for Children. For more information, call 1-800-ASK-BCCC.

Charlotte's lost sense of direction

GERALD O. JOHNSON

As I See It



I was saddened to hear about the incident that led to the death of James Willie Cooper. I did not know Mr. Cooper, but the circumstances surrounding his death have darkened the cloud of doubt that lingers over the black community and its relationship with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.

The cloud was helped along by the outcome of the 1993 Windy Gail Thompson shooting by a white police officer. The black community still has unanswered questions about the circumstances surrounding that

shooting. It is deeply felt that the entire truth has not been revealed.

Now, three years after that incident, we are facing another white police officer shooting an unarmed victim who happened to be black. I feel strongly that the incident needs close scrutiny. I am not convinced that an independent review committee is the right answer. Who would make up this committee? Who would they answer to? Who would pick the individuals to serve on the committee? I don't see the need, but maybe it has merit. I have not been convinced.

I think the current city council can review the findings and determine if the findings are reasonable. If people still feel the findings are not satisfactory, then they can hire attorneys to represent them.

But what saddens me as

much as the incidents aforementioned is our reaction to them. The black community was outraged that for the second time in three years a white officer has taken a black life. We have daily meetings to discuss this thing. The black community has been outraged, the white community has been on pins and needles because we have had the second killing of a black citizen by a white police officer. Practically every black minister has felt compelled to speak on this situation. All of our elected officials have risen to the occasion to address this as an urgent issue.

The city council meeting this week had more black people than I have ever seen at a council meeting, all because we have had the second killing of a black citizen by a white police officer in three years.

Yet, we are killing each other

at a rate of three per week. Black on black crime has reached epidemic proportions. Where is the outrage? Why are we not up in arms about killings that are making our young men an endangered species? Why aren't we singing this hymn from the pulpits? Why is the Rev. James Barnett a lone voice in the wilderness on "stop the killing" as it relates to us killing each other? Is a black life only valuable when it is lost at the hands of a white person?

I am saddened by the Cooper incident. My sympathy goes out to the Cooper family. I am saddened for Officer Marlow and his family, who will have to live with this incident for the rest of their lives. I am deeply saddened for a black community that continues to wear the mental shackles of slavery.

GERALD O. JOHNSON is publisher of The Charlotte Post.

COMMUNITY NOTICE

...IN LIGHT OF THE RECENT FATAL SHOOTING OF AN UNARMED BLACK MOTORIST, THE NEED FOR A CITIZENS REVIEW BOARD MAY OR MAY NOT BE ADDRESSED... REMEMBER, NOTHING IS ETCHED IN STONE. WELL... ALMOST NOTHING...



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Creating a culture of rights in U.S.

By Ron Daniels
SPECIAL TO THE POST

While it is important to struggle to repair the torn and tattered safety net of welfare and social programs in this country, ultimately far more is needed to ensure a decent quality of life for every person who lives in this society.

The concept of "inalienable rights" and the "pursuit of happiness" as articulated in the Declaration of Independence must embrace the right to live free of hunger, poverty, disease, homelessness, illiteracy, and pollution.

It is interesting to note that despite the claim that America is the greatest nation in the world, most western industrial

nations have a much higher standard of living for poor and working people than the U.S. That standard of living is the result of a culture of rights - which provides a very generous range of welfare and social programs to take care of the needy, workers and, in some instances the middle class.

For example, the U.S. is the only western industrialized nation that does not have a universal health care system to guarantee health care for all of its residents. In nations like Germany and France 8-10 weeks of paid vacation is virtually mandatory and there are generous provisions for unemployment compensation, housing, paid pregnancy leave, child care, elder care, transportation

for the needy and assistance with utilities payments in the winter months for the poor. Many western nations also provide free public education from pre-school through the college/university level.

The culture of rights which has developed in other western democracies, however, did not evolve because of any inherent generosity by the ruling elites in these countries. The culture of rights emerged as a product of relentless and sustained struggle by poor and working people in these nations. Virtually every other western industrialized nation has major socialist and communist parties whose ideas of worker rights and egalitarianism permeate the society and command allegiance of sizeable

sectors of the population. In addition, thriving and powerful labor unions have not only led the struggle for improved wages and benefits for their members, but social welfare programs to benefit poor and working people in general. The power of labor unions in other industrial democracies is bolstered by a weapon that labor unions in the U.S. are forbidden by law to utilize - the general strike. Private and public sector workers can back up their demands by paralyzing an entire nation at will.

A decent standard of living for all must not be seen as a privilege, but a basic human right in the United States of America.

RON DANIELS is a New York-based columnist and essayist.

Are curfews for African Americans?

By Naya Arinde
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Editor's Note: Communities throughout the country are seeking ways to address the crisis of juvenile crime. One controversial option is police-enforced teen curfews. While there have been no conclusive studies documenting the effectiveness of curfews as a deterrent to crime, an increasing number of municipalities are introducing and/or have legislated curfew restrictions.

The discussion in New York City echoes the debate taking place in large cities like Washington, D. C., Miami and Los Angeles, as well as smaller communities like Phoenix and Indianapolis. Curfews already in place are being heavily scrutinized and are being legally challenged for their constitutionality.

"Surely a teen who breaks the law will not be concerned with breaking a curfew," Councilwoman C. Virginia Fields told the Daily Challenge in response to the City Council's proposed curfew on New York teens.

Voicing strong disagreement with the city's plan, Fields added, "What we should be doing is working towards a safer environment for our youth, not punishing them in advance for crimes they have not committed."

The city council contend that placing juveniles out in public places between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. contribute to acts of delinquency. Members have therefore proposed curfew restrictions from 10 p.m. on Sunday through Thursday and 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday until 6 a.m.

The proposal further states that youth remaining in a public place after 10 p.m. or the owner of a public establishment or a parent or guardian 'allowing' an under-age person to break the curfew will be in violation. The only noted exceptions are youth accompanied by a guardian; youth who are married or 'emanipated' youth who are employed or traveling to or from work, school, religious establishment or a recreational activity supervised by adults.

A police officer would be empowered to escort the youth home or to the local precinct, or issue a summons. For a first offense the youth could receive up to 25 hours of community service, while the owner of an establishment and a parent/guardian could be fined. Parents/guardians may also be "required by the court to obtain counseling or attend classes to

improve parenting and child-raising skills."

"The city does not belong in my house," said Gwendolyn James, a Queens mother of two teenagers. "How can they tell me what time my young adults have to be home. Are we edging towards a police state?"

"After listening to testimony on juvenile curfew laws at a recent City Council Public Safety Committee hearing, I am more convinced than ever that such a law for New York City is untimely and ill-advised," Councilwoman Fields said recently.

"Why create opportunities to involve juveniles in the criminal justice system? Our goal should be to keep as many youth as possible from coming in contact with this system," she said.

NAYA ARINDE is a National Newspaper Publishers Association columnist.