

# The Charlotte Post

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## Address the challenge of poverty, race

### Mecklenburg must continue to work toward equal opportunity

By Parks Helms  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Notwithstanding the accomplishments we have made — and our demonstrated status as one of America's "up and coming" cities, there are seeds of discontent. The message is clear for those who will listen and look that we risk losing the sense of community that has been so important to our progress. Strengthening and undergirding our commitment to community is a major challenge as we chart a course and set priorities for the future.

Last month during the swearing-in ceremony, I urged the county commission and the people of Mecklenburg County to focus on one issue of overriding importance. That issue is poverty. It's demoralizing and damaging effect on the spirit of community that we have for so long enjoyed can be devastating.



Helms

It's from the seed of poverty that crime is born. It's from the hopelessness of poverty that welfare and substance abuse thrive. It's from abject poverty that poor nutrition and poor health overtake our children in their homes and classrooms. And it's the denial and disregard of poverty that leads to communities coming apart at the seams. And ladies

and gentlemen — if that happens, a safe, healthy, livable and prosperous community will be a long way off for all of us.

A principal part of the responsibility for addressing poverty lies with the county commission. As we all know, a disproportionately large percentage of our county budget goes for poverty-related issues. To effectively address this, we must operate efficiently, must operate cooperatively with the city, and must operate in partnership with the private sector.

What is our greatest challenge?

Our history and our status today lead us to the inescapable conclusion that we must focus our attention and allocate our resources to provide quality education for all our children; to make social service available to those most needy among us; to support the improvement of the administration of justice and to provide adequate jails to make the court system effective; to make more public recreation facilities and libraries available across the county. And the environmental summit later this year should set the stage for long-term planning to preserve the quality of our air and water. Responsible growth management is essential.

All of these are worthy challenges for the leadership and the citizenry of the genuinely "great state of Mecklenburg."

...But these challenges pale in comparison to what I believe is the greatest challenge of all. It is the subtle divisiveness of race, gender, economic status, ethnicity and geography that can defeat the successful implementation of the priorities enumerated above. Stated another way, the greatest threat to our continuing health and prosperity is a loss of a sense of community that has blessed our passage thus far.

Mecklenburg County is the most populous and wealthy county in North Carolina. And yet, too many of our number have not shared in the benefits of a flourishing economy. Too many are struggling. Too many are homeless. An estimated homeless population of 3,000 is not acceptable in a community that cares.

Mecklenburg County has a healthy diversity of population with nearly one-third of our citizens being African-American and other minorities, but we have not overcome the prejudice and mistrust that continue to divide our community.

Inequalities in income and employment are apparent as seen in the following statistics:

- While roughly 25 percent of the county's population is African American, 82 percent of the households receiving AFDC payments in the county are African American.
- The rate of unemployment of African Americans in our community is twice that of the overall community rate.
- African Americans comprise 62 percent of the total population of abused and neglected children in Mecklenburg County.
- 87 percent of heads of households in Charlotte's public housing units are African Americans.
- The dropout rate for African-American children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System is almost twice as high as that of white children.
- Less than half of African American eighth graders are able to read at that grade level, compared with 81% of their white classmates able to do so.

...I believe we have permitted our isolation from each other to excuse our failure to deal honestly with many of the policy issues that have impeded our progress and continue to drive a wedge between different races, different neighborhoods, different economic levels, and different ethnic groups.

The consequences of our failure to address the divisiveness that exists within this country can be devastating. I believe the county commission, in cooperation with the city of Charlotte, the Chamber of Commerce, the school board, and others should take the initiative to begin the task of breaking down the subtle walls of divisiveness that prevent us from achieving our full potential as a community.

We need to create an environment that allows — no, forces us — to see ourselves as part of the same community. We must accept and respect our different perspectives as being part of what defines us. We are not a one-race, one-religion, one-gender, one-political affiliation community. We are a community absolutely teeming with diversity. And yet, we must realize it is this diversity that may be our greatest asset.

PARKS HELMS is Chairman of the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners.

## Black Monday is decidedly gray

GERALD O. JOHNSON

As I See It



On Jan. 27, Black Monday will occur in Charlotte. African Americans will be asked to stay home from school and work, and only spend money with African American businesses. I can not in good conscience support this effort.

I am unclear of the purpose for Black Monday. On one hand I am hearing that this is to protest the James Willie Cooper shooting and the offending officer going unpunished. Then I hear it is to show African American solidarity and strength.

I am not sure how pulling children out school, keeping people out of work and not spending money with non-African American businesses addresses either point. But more importantly, what is going to happen on Tuesday? Black Monday will happen with media attention and then what?

The event will happen with some media attention, but very little community impact. Normally, I would say why bother. But the one good thing coming from all of this is new groups and faces are showing concern. Young black people are finding community issues that they can come together on. So, it is a start. But the time would be better spent if instead of keeping children out of school, volunteer to go into the schools and tutor some

struggling kids. Instead of asking people to stay home from work, volunteer to help the unemployed get jobs and job training.

We have to begin to take ourselves seriously if we expect others to do likewise. Getting media attention does not validate a cause. Solid and factual reasons do.

Don Reid is no racist

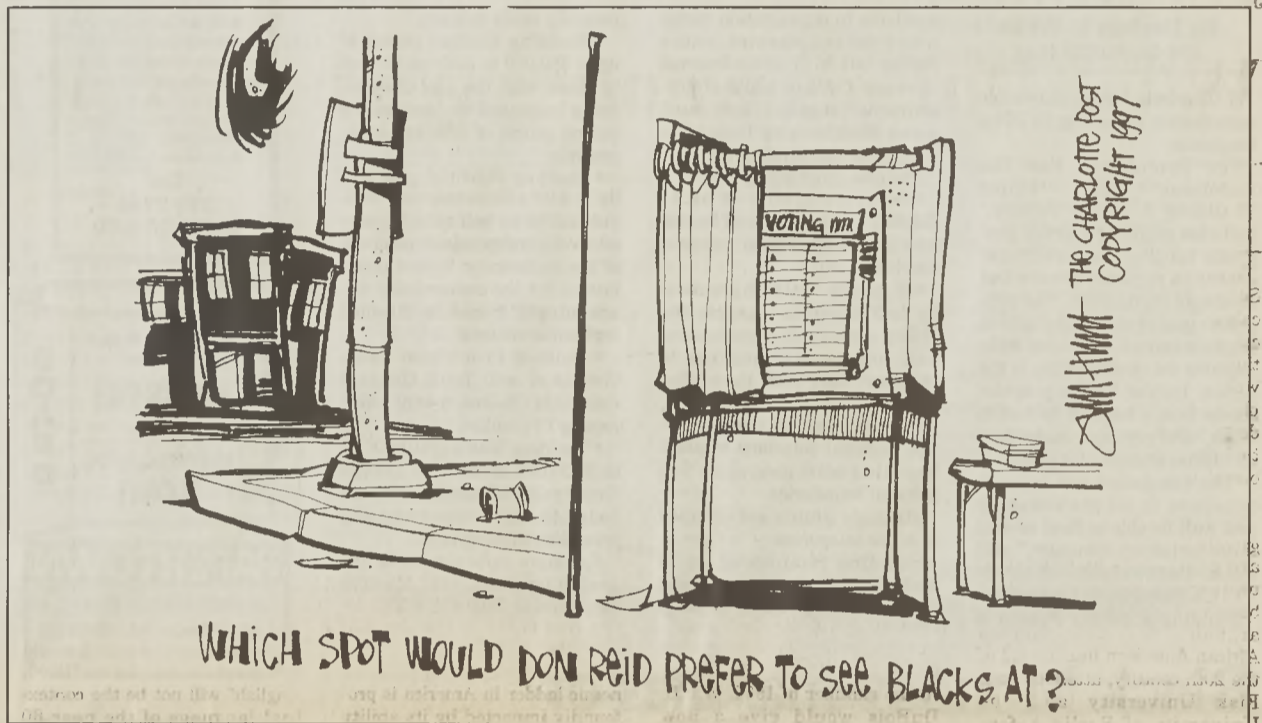
Charlotte city council member Don Reid made the comment to members of Leadership Charlotte that if he were walking down the street and saw two black teenagers and two white teenagers walking towards him, he would be afraid of the black teenagers. The statement caused outrage in the black community. Quite a few people are calling Don a racist. I have

known him for some time now and I will say Don is a lot of things, but a racist I don't think, is one of them.

One thing I have always admired Don for is speaking his mind. I know he expects the same from people he deals with.

But instead of hearing statements like Don made and becoming offended, we need to use them as beginning points for dialogue. Ask what is meant by that statement. Respect other people's feelings and allow them to speak their minds without attaching labels to them for their statements. Forget about this political correctness crap and say what you mean and mean what you say. Allow others to do the same. Then and only then will we begin to see real change with some of this community's real problems.

GERALD O. JOHNSON is publisher of The Charlotte Post.



## Woe to enemies of black empowerment

By Michael Muhammad  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Woe to the shepherds who stand and preach the word of God on Sunday and practice the word of Satan during the week. Woe to the shepherd who professes concern for the community in private meetings, but report to the enemy the strategy discussed in those meetings.

Woe to the shepherds whose political agenda supersedes the problems of the people. Woe to the shepherds who preach with strength and conviction behind the sanctity of their robes, but who are afraid

to lead the people on the battlefield for justice. Woe to the shepherds who seek to hide the truth, while they know and manipulate their congregations at the behest of the power brokers. Woe to the shepherds who seek photo opportunities with visiting national leaders and offer the use of their churches just to be seen of men. Woe to the vision cable shepherds who would condemn a man doing the work of Christ that they claim as their saviour, but who are too weak themselves to follow the same path as Jesus. Woe to all those wicked shepherds whose ways seem right unto

men (and women) but the ends thereof are the ways of death. By misinforming, misleading, misdirecting, misleading, and misinterpreting the scripture of both the Bible and the Holy Quran, you dear Pastor, Reverend, and Imam are sentencing your Black folk and indeed yourselves to the path of Hell.

When your flock awakes, and they will, your pulpit will be as a pit of fire for all your egotistical, self-righteous deception and diversion from the truth or our unified strength against the malicious and willful attacks against Sister Wendy Gail Thompson

and Willie James Cooper by uniformed murderers. The reality of black oppression is not a shared sympathy by the white community.

The things that power brokers understand are aggressive force and economic retaliation, and since we don't possess the where-with-all to do combat, we must seek some measure of awareness to our plight by holding back our dollars from all white institutions if only for one day...Black Monday, Jan. 27, 1997 and what a difference a day can make.

MICHAEL MUHAMMAD lives in Charlotte.

## The real key to Charlotte's heart

By Joan W. Abrams  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Maybe if the recipients of the "key" to the City of Charlotte knew how this city runs and treats some of its citizens, the "key" might not have been accepted by them. Show who are called unacceptable know this first-hand now because its been done to you.

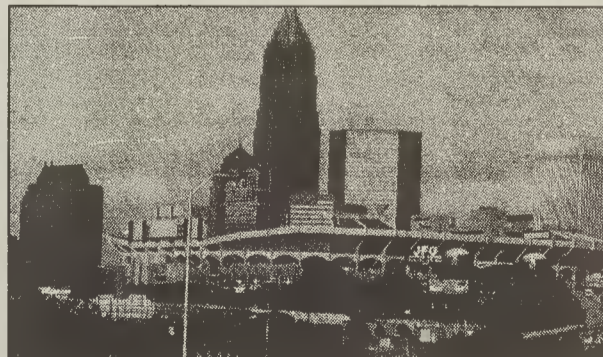
• A city that allows bad police officers to get away with murder.

• A city that has good black/white who can't speak the truth openly for fear of losing their jobs, but they all know a lie when they hear one.

• A city that allows schools and shopping centers to be continuously built in areas for its well-to-do citizens.

• A city that reflects that the tax dollars are not being used fairly when it comes to certain communities.

• A city that's proposing to close well-established neighborhood service centers with numerous service providers who have decentralized their ser-



FILE PHOTO

For all its accomplishments, Charlotte has serious problems, especially when it comes to providing for the poor.

vices to make them more convenient for the people they serve.

• A city that allows drugs to infiltrate certain areas before something major is done and the citizens have been robbed of their right to a safe environment.

• A city that allows drug dealers to continue selling drugs and when they accumulate the amount of money and assets that is enough by someone's

standards, then they are suddenly arrested and punished. (one individual sold drugs for 25 years).

• A city that is proud of its jails and its thriving economy, but won't provide more preventive measures for the children who are its future.

• A city that can build major thoroughfares, but couldn't fix Beatties Ford Road before, but now that the Panthers have

arrived, the job can be done.

• A city that can find thousands of dollars for traffic signals and lights — many only used for sports events.

• A city whose educational system lacks the needed funding to ensure the expected outcomes. Our future should be funded beyond measure!

• A city that allows some elected officials to steal property from indigenous people and cover up their tracks in the name of progress.

• A city that allows citizens to be forced out of their residences) downtown so college bankers can live uptown.

• A city that can build a coliseum, a coliseum, and a coliseum while poor people continue to suffer.

• A city that is rapidly growing, spreading the gap between communities that share common goals and problems.

• A city that's for fostering the notion that money is the "key."

• Money, Money, Money! Now that's the real "key" to the city of Charlotte.

JOAN W. ABRAMS lives in Matthews.