

The Charlotte Post

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

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Fear of blacks justified by circumstances

By Don Reid
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The following is an abbreviated text of Don Reid's remarks before Charlotte City Council on Jan. 27 about race relations in Charlotte.

Since this entire episode tonight has been smeared with the term racism: definition of racism, "a belief that race is the primary determinate of human traits and capabilities; an inherent superiority of a particular race."

Now since I am older than most of you, I've had some experiences that some of you may never have had. I grew up in an environment where together - we blacks and whites, worked in the tobacco and cotton fields, all with one common thread that made us a very tightly knit group. "We had to work to eat."

There was virtually no crime - nobody locked their doors, day or night.



Reid

I have five daughters and two granddaughters. We all know that men as a group commit 99 percent of the violent crimes against women. Is it wrong to tell our wives and daughters to beware of men in places like dimly lit parking garages, parking lots and city streets. Should they be called sexist for taking those precautions? I think not.

I don't feel superior to anyone. Tonight, in this audience, there are many people, my supporters both black and white, who know this to be true.

Two weeks ago at Leadership Charlotte, one of the participants in answer to a question about racism in Charlotte said this (at night at intersections in Charlotte, young black men, lock my doors - I'm racist, prejudiced, I need to work on this). I said this is not true-you do this because you are afraid-and for good reason; a huge disproportionate share of violent crime in Charlotte is committed by black males. I also said that people are more likely to be afraid of young black men on the streets of Charlotte at night. For this I'm called irresponsible and racist? I did not stereotype all black men - I fully realize that a vast majority of the black community is responsible, hard-working citizens. Many of them are my friends.

I have listened carefully to the criticisms tonight, and I have reflected on them. I regret there may be some misunderstanding. However, I'm sure of this. The real racists here are some of the same people who are complaining the loudest and demanding my resignation for telling the truth.

Yelling racist-racism has often been the first and last defense for these self-appointed, self-righteous, so-called leaders. Too many times this term has been used to cover up the truth, to vilify the messenger and prevent real issues from coming to the table.

It is a tactic that has been used for centuries by the likes of Marx, Lenin, Hitler, to squash criticism and honest debate.

...There are many people in this city who are controlled by the feat that they will be called racists. But to all of you I won't be intimidated by your threats. In fact, I have been looking forward to this night. After all, the greatest satisfaction I get as a council member is confronting hypocrisy and people who want to use public money for their own personal gain. I will not become politically correct to curry the favor of a few so-called leaders who use racism to increase their power, prestige and wealth... Crime is a very serious problem in our town. The security system yard sign is quickly replacing trees as the symbol of Charlotte. Crime is the No. 1 problem in many black communities - I know! Residents of these communities often come to this council for help. In some public housing, violent crime is over 100 percent, and many whites are afraid of black men. That's unfortunate, but it is true, and until that problem is addressed, the entire black community, a vast majority of which are hard-working, responsible citizens, tends to be painted with that brush. It is a problem that can be solved only with the cooperation of the entire community. It won't be solved by calling the messenger a racist...

And as for my resignation, listen carefully, read my lips, "FAT CHANCE!" In fact, some of you should consider resigning. Maybe Mr. Davis should resign as head of the Black Political Caucus and allow new leadership for the 21st century.

And if we really want to strike a blow against racism, let's rename the Black Political Caucus. Let's call it the Black and White Political Caucus and include some white folks on the board; people who will tell the truth, unlike the few pandering pompous white elitists who tell you what you want to hear, who tickle your ears, and are very, very offended by the truth...

And you, Ron Leeper, yes I received your mean-spirited letter in which you suggest that my remarks at Leadership Charlotte were an attempt to capitalize on the distrust related to the shooting of Mr. James Cooper. Words like these, and you have the gall to call me irresponsible. Further, you state, "I believe you are more dangerous than any of these kids out in the community." Ron, why don't you tell that to:

- the family of the lady from Oregon
- the friends and families of over 500 black men, many quite young, who were killed in Charlotte over the past 9-10 years
- the families of four police officers who were killed in the last four years

The list is long.

...And as for you Bill Simms, I'm greatly disappointed in you. Numerous times I have pointed to you as a role model for blacks and whites in this community. How could you lower yourself and participate in this lynching attempt? You certainly don't need the sword of racism to gain power, prestige or money. You have earned all three.

Some people are saying that you are trying to discredit me because I don't support you and your 24 UP partners who want to use tax money to build the entertainment complex/arena uptown. I don't want to believe that. What is your explanation? Whatever, Bill, you have tarnished your "good guy" image with many people in Charlotte.

...Tonight's lynch mob should take note of this - you're in a small minority...

Get to causes of fear of black men

By Daniel Thompson
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Much has been written and said about Don Reid's recent comments, concerning his fear of young black men. While I respect Don's candid approach, and agree with his right to voice his honest feeling about the topic, I was disappointed that he did not go further about the topic of race relations in Charlotte.

If Don, as an elected official, feels such fear, it seems to me that his comments stopped far short of addressing the causes of such fear, and, more importantly, suggestions as to his solutions to the problem. Leadership, as defined by retired Gen. Colin Powell, is accomplishing the mission, while taking care of the troops. I would submit that we certainly

have not, as a community, accomplished the mission of seeking stable race relations in Charlotte (although I do not feel it is as bad as the "news" would have us believe by all their sensationalism surrounding reports of crime in our City). The second part of Gen. Powell's definition is, to me, the most vital part of the equation, and the part that is severely lacking by our elected officials, by our budgets, and by our concern in general.

Let us assume that the fear of young black men is founded. What then, is the cause for such fear? Allow me to list a few of the reasons that occur to me.

1. When I see some of the areas where young children must live - many without parents who care and teach; areas that provide no opportunity,

no economic hope, and no adult who seems to care about who they are, where they go, or what they do, I am amazed that the problem is not more severe than it is.

2. Public schools that bring children who come to school ill-prepared, poorly clothed and fed, to study an irrelevant curriculum, but are expected to blend in with their more fortunate peers - and more incredulously - are expected to achieve and feel good about themselves!

3. Peer pressure that demands the street toughness we hear in "rap music," we see daily on television, and we witness with seeming disinterest in blighted neighborhoods.

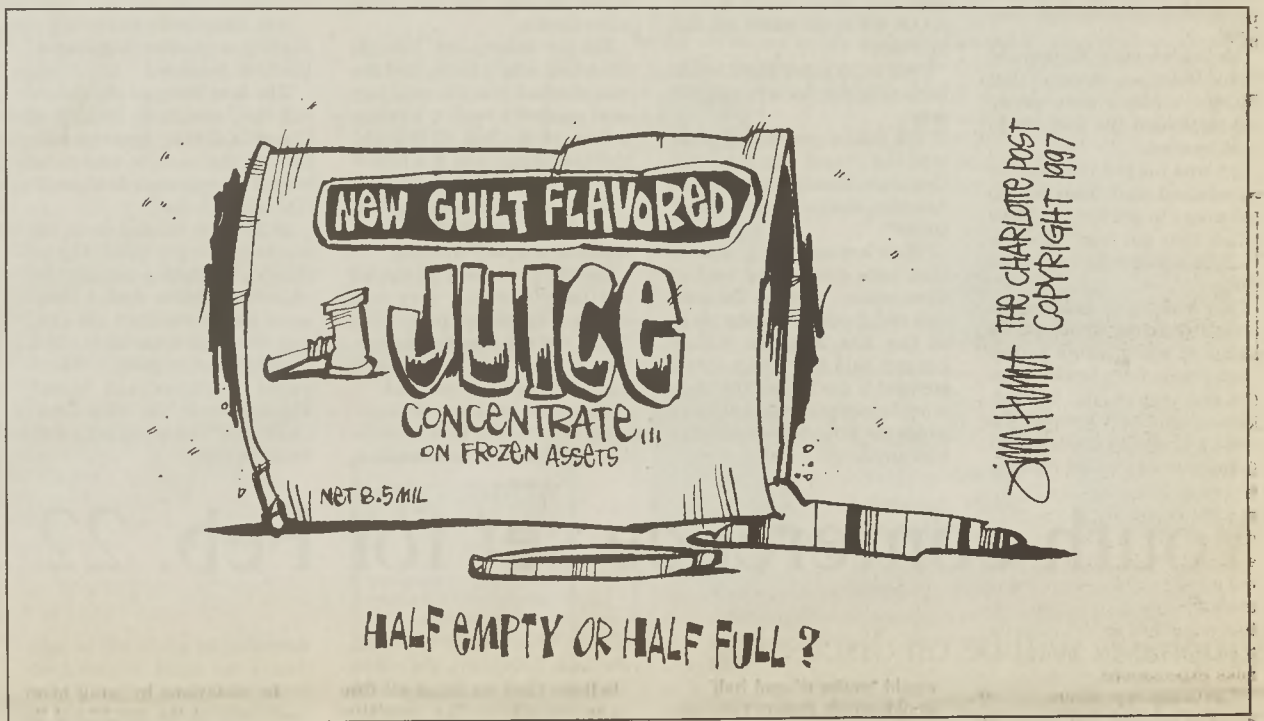
4. Mistrust of a system that, historically, has left them out of the mainstream.

When will we learn that our priorities are misplaced when

we can pay \$30,000 a year in tax dollars to jail a criminal, but we cannot provide comprehensive child care during the pre-school years. We can pay \$100,000 for professional testimony in a recent murder trial, not to mention the tax dollars that went to the trial itself, but we cannot afford counselors, training, and proper care for children in transition. We can afford new jails, coliseums, sports complexes, and all the other "glitz" that we think makes us "world class," while we downsize or drop children's programs, due to a lack of funding.

I sincerely hope that the public hearings suggested by Bill Simms have a positive effect, and receive the attention that this topic deserves.

DANIEL THOMPSON lives in Charlotte.



Christians should work for real change

By Nora Chambers
SPECIAL TO THE POST

"There was a beautiful time when the church was very powerful in the time when early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed.

Whenever early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbances of the peace" and "outside agitators." But they pressed on in the conviction that they were a colony of heaven, called to obey God rather than man. In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote those words in a letter to a group of Ministers and Rabbis who took issue with his

peaceful protests. They wanted to keep things just as they were...didn't want to start any trouble...wanted to be silent on the issues at hand. Dr. King was not referring to them as "disturbances of the peace" or as "outside agitators."

We, today as Christians, are faced with the same dilemma as King - to get involved and make things change, or to stay put and hope things change. If you were to ask five different people to comment on the state of race relations in Charlotte (from diverse backgrounds,) you would probably get five different answers. Oh, I know what you're thinking! Here we go again with this diversity talk...and I'm sure the agency where you work already does

work in this area. And true this is 1997...so what's the issue.

W.E.B. DuBois stated that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line. It has been said that race is America's obsession--with good reason. But this writing is not to America or to North Carolina for that matter. I'm not talking to those people who would seek to harm folk, I'm writing to the Charlotte Christian community, the ecclesia, the called-out ones. And for those who would dare think we've arrived in all areas, let us not forget to whom our Bible was written.

There is a reason that God keeps us on the anvil in the blacksmith's shop. He wants to shape us into the image of His dear son. Prepare for turbulence

in the process. But why us? Lord. We're not hurting anybody - that's them! We are the ones to profess to have the answer to the problems of the world. We say his name is Jesus, and that we are ashamed of His gospel. With all that the Bible states we have, there's no better time for us to be Christians - with having the answer and all. But we can no longer sit back and just be good, well meaning Christian...not when there is unrest in this city right now in race relations.

There is a problem - let's not kid ourselves. Yes, even in the household of faith. The question is, what are we, ones with the answers, going to do.

NORA CHAMBERS lives in Charlotte.

Races have a long way to go here

By Kelly Alexander Jr.
SPECIAL TO THE POST

The recent comments of councilman Don Reid and commissioner Tom Bush about black teenagers and their feelings as whites should serve as benchmarks for just how far race relations in Charlotte has come, and just how far it still has to go.

When elected public officials feel comfortable in conveying a "threat stereotype" of black teens, it is no wonder that Jake King was shot dead in his front yard; that Windy Gail Thompson, though unable to move, was shot dead in her car, and that James Willie Cooper, was shot dead because he turned to reassure his little girl sitting in the back seat of his car. Each of the officers in question, brought to their encounter with destiny the same feelings about the threat potential of blacks, as expressed by councilman Reid and commissioner Bush.

Some years ago my ex-wife was detained while shopping in

Matthews because "she looked like" a woman who had stolen merchandise from the store a week before. Upon investigation her resemblance boiled down to two things. She was black and she wore corn rows.

She also was unfortunate enough to be a black person shopping in a place and at a time when the clerk thought only whites would be about. She could have resisted being unjustly arrested, and been shot with her hands up a la Jake King, or rushed to her parked car and ended up like Windy Gail Thompson and James Willie Cooper. She was, in retrospect, lucky.

The other day I was driving sedately along Carmel Road, when I looked in my rear view and saw a flashing blue light. Knowing, I was obeying all the traffic rules, my first thought was a negative "What am I being stopped for now?" The officer only wanted to get by, not stop me. I find myself looking more closely at officers I pass

who have stopped black motorists. I notice that many more black drivers are slowing down and observing these situations, too.

An ex-police officer suggested that I imagine what goes on in the mind of a white officer, who is told before he ventures into the west side to "watch your back, it's a jungle out there." Is he more inclined to protect and serve or to approach each and every situation as if he

Alexander

has a bull's eye painted on the back of his uniform? When you believe that every black teenager you see is a potential threat, it's a wonder that our community has not experienced more incidents of unfounded violence.

What we need as a community is leadership out of the quagmire of incrementally worsening race relations. When parents in

Matthews want to succeed from the school system in the euphemistic service of neighborhood schools, no one is fooled. When Don Reid and Tom Bush, voice what they say is a common feeling among whites, and are surprised at the reaction of blacks, no one is fooled.

When the City Council drags its feet on allocating money for video cameras in police cars and citizen review, no one is fooled. It's just business as usual.

Parks Helms, the visionary chair of our county commission, is correct. While we have been concentrating on bricks and mortar, we have not paid enough attention to a systematic approach to overcoming the divisiveness, that if left alone will bring our collective quality of life crashing down. We should all pray for the success of his Task Force on the Quality and Value of Life in Mecklenburg County.

KELLY ALEXANDER JR. is former president of the N.C. NAACP.