

Ignoring inevitable in Kinshasha and home in the U.S.

D.G. Martin



Kinshasha, Zaire.

I am not really there – at least not physically. It is a long way from North Carolina.

But my mind is there right now – thinking about the people in that city. And about us here in North Carolina, too.

Kinshasha has been in the news the last few months. It is the capital city of one of Africa's largest countries. Some of us remember it as the Belgian Congo and its capital city not as Kinshasha but as Leopoldville.

The country is rich in natural resources. But the colonial experience left it ill-prepared for independence.

A strong military dictatorship

has crushed all other institutions – political, economic, civic – so that it would have no competitors for power.

Nevertheless, the government provided stability. Not perfect perhaps, but there has been a way of doing things, a predictability, and a security of sorts.

Now there is an uprising in a part of the country far away from Kinshasha. But the government and military, having stamped out the strength of the nation's other institutions, now find they have not strength to resist. The rebellion began on the country's eastern fringes. The small, better-disciplined armies of the rebels chased away the government defenders at every turn. Now, just a few months after they began, they control much of the country's territory.

Meanwhile, back in Kinshasha, people are having to deal with

the fact that everything is going to change – soon. They come to believe that the government, which has seemed all-powerful, has no power to stop the invaders.

I am thinking about those who are attached to the government establishment or to the military. They know that when the rebels come to Kinshasha, everything will be up for grabs.

They will lose their jobs and their homes. Maybe there will be capture and prison – or assault and rape. They know that what will happen to them in the near future could be awful.

How do they manage?

Apparently they do just what they would do if there were no threat. They go to work. They come home and eat and sleep. They do mostly what they would have done as if nothing were going to change.

And I feel with them the eerie feeling of sameness when all is

about to change.

What does this have to do with North Carolina and with us? Maybe it is a stretch. But, my heart is in Kinshasha not so much because of their up-coming change and suffering, but because we here in North Carolina are doing the same thing.

Although threats are all around us, we – just like those in Kinshasha – act as if there were nothing to worry about.

For instance, our inadequate sewer systems pour pollutants into our streams and rivers and threaten to destroy them – and us, too.

Yet we flush our toilets with abandon. And we manage our business-generated pollutants as if tomorrow's crises will never come.

In other areas, we see some of our people falling so far behind economically that crime and drugs and political discontent are bound to destroy them – and

damage the rest of us, too.

Yet we sidestep the issue.

"It is not up to me to help them," we say. "One person can't do very much to help. And besides, God helps those who help themselves."

On other days we say, "It is up to private charity. The government ought to stay out of this matter."

"Somebody else," we say to ourselves, "should be thinking about all these things."

Meanwhile, we just keep doing what we have always done – acting like things will always be the same.

Acting just like the people in Kinshasha. Waiting until the rebel soldiers are at the city gates. Before we change our ways.

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Setting standards for funding is on target

By Hoyle H. Martin
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Much has been said and written about what has been called my hateful, mean-spirited and bigoted resolution to deny county funding for some programs funded through the Arts & Science Council and the divisiveness it has allegedly caused.

Contrary to such views is the fact that the divisiveness began when the ASC endorsed the presentation of "Angels in America" and its homosexual theme. In response to the divisiveness over the issue, the ASC established, on its own initiative, a Public Funding Task Force of 27 citizens to "examine public funding for the arts...in the wake of 'Angels in America.'" The Task Force developed a "Declaration of Findings: Mutual Respect, Legal, Community Standards, and Process. However, the 'Findings' under Community Standards reflects a major flaw. It says, 'Believing that state and federal constitutions provide broad parameters of community standards, it is not necessary to define such standards.'

However, it seems ironic that all levels of government have established some standards on what could justifiably be called moral grounds. For example, both our city and county governments require that x-rated video stores and topless bars be located a specific distance from schools, churches, day care facilities, and residential

neighborhoods. Recently the city council created a standard requiring escort services to register with the police department because many have been found to be covers for prostitution links.

Furthermore, the state of North Carolina has an anti-sodomy law, largely unenforceable, but nevertheless a standard. The U.S. Congress recently ordered network television and the motion picture industries to improve their rating systems to reduce the possible exposure of violence and sexually explicit acts as young children. For the same reasons, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled recently in two separate cases that the computer Internet and cable vision industries must "scramble out" explicit sex and violence from children. Then, last week the N.C. Supreme Court ruled that confidential testing for the AIDS virus shall replace random testing and thus require persons tested to provide their names. This action, opposed by a gay rights group, is another standard to protect public health. Thus, from the U.S. Supreme Court down to the lowest unit of governments, all have standards for something, but the high and mighty ASC thinks it doesn't need any.

Therefore, since the ASC failed to assume the required sense of responsibility accompanying the freedom to disburse county funding for the arts, I had no choice but to seek support to end their duly elected custodians of the public purse deciding when, where, and how to spend

public dollars. In this instance, it appears far more appropriate to spend tax money for music programs and other public schools needs than for unnecessary and possibly controversial "art" lacking any standard of quality.

Finally, the three corporations that have co-opted the Urban League under the veil of diversity to assist them to unseat me and those who supported my resolution are exhibiting the ultimate in intolerance. An Observer editorial (April 10) points out in part a major flaw in this ridiculous plan when it says, "an organized drive by business leaders to challenge incumbent commissioners might backfire, by creating a David v. Goliath scenario that obscures the real issues." And the belligerent attitude, and the responsibility elected officials have for deciding how taxpayers' dollars are spent.

In the same regard, I hope Hugh McColl remembers I told him the the 24-UP group might fail for using bully tactics, and indeed they did fail.

HOYLE H. MARTIN is a Mecklenburg County commissioner and author of a proclamation that cut off county funding to arts groups who show works deemed counter to traditional family values.



Martin

A double play: Robinson and Wendell Smith



The "noble experiment" succeeded when Jackie Robinson desegregated professional baseball.

By Todd Burroughs
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

"We have been fighting for years in an effort to make owners of major league baseball teams admit Negro players. But they won't do it, probably never will. We keep on crawling, begging and pleading for recognition just the same. We know that they don't want us, but we still keep giving them our money. Keep on going to their ball games and shouting until we are blue in the face. Oh, we're an optimistic, faithful, prideless lot – we pitiful black folk. Yes sir – we black folk are a strange tribe."

–Wendell Smith, sports columnist for The Pittsburgh Courier, in a 1938 column called "Smitty's Sport Spurts"

"I will be forever indebted to Wendell because, without his even knowing it, his recommendation of me to Branch Rickey

was in the end partly responsible for my career."

– Jackie Robinson, in his second autobiography, "I Never Had It Made," published in 1972 and written with the assistance of Al Duckett, a former New York Age editor.

Jim Crow was in effect. The Courier was angry. It launched a crusade on behalf of the Negro. So what else was new? By 1947, the year Jackie Robinson integrated major league baseball, something was wrong with the universe if The Courier, the powerhouse of America's Negro weeklies, was not in the middle of one of its quests to right the wrongs of America. It had sponsored such journalistic battles for more than a decade, and would continue the policy well into the 1950s and beyond.

But one particular campaign by the nation's largest Negro newspaper would bring two Negro men together and hold

them in a tight bond – composed of mutual trust, friendship, loyalty and dedication to the race – while white America conducted its "noble experiment."

Another Courier crusade

The Courier had officially begun its crusade to integrate baseball in 1933. During that decade, it was not the only newspaper, Negro or white, stirring over the question of desegregating the nation's pastime. But its huge 1940s circulation in several states with substantial Negro populations made it a voice well heard in Negro America. And its main voice on the issue was Wendell Smith.

One man's determination

Wendell Smith was born in Detroit and worked in an integrated neighborhood, according to his widow Wyonella. His father was the chef for Henry

Ford.

"He was an athlete and grew up on the same block with Mike Tresh, who later became a catcher for the White Sox. They were friends and teammates," she told author David Faulkner. But a day at the diamond in 1933 would change Smith's direction. Writes author Jim Reisler:

"[A]fter [Smith] pitched his [integrated Detroit American Legion] team to a 1-0 victory in a playoff game, a scout signed both his catcher Mike Tresh and the game's losing pitcher to contracts. The scout told Smith he wanted to sign him as well, but couldn't."

"Smith later used that incident as an inspiration for his decision to become a sports-writer and work for baseball's integration."

Longtime Chicago Black Press reporter Enoch P. Waters has written the cause became Smith's "obsession" as a Courier sportswriter. Reisler said Smith, who joined The Courier in 1937 and became sports editor three years later, "fit the aggressive, sometimes angry style of Courier editor Robert L. Vann." A series of "lengthy, exhaustive pieces" by Smith in 1939 served as the centerpiece of the newspaper's baseball campaign, added the author.

Evelyn Cunningham, a Smith friend and a Courier columnist in the 1940s, said he was "dogged and determined" to make white baseball bend. "I always (thought) that Wendell knew it was going to happen, but he didn't know when and he was tired, he was tired, (thinking,) 'Why doesn't this just hurry up and happen?'" she said in an interview last year.

Smith, campaigning hard for the tryouts of Negro league players in 1945, found an unlikely ally in Branch Rickey,

general manager for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Smith and Rickey became close associates as Smith's suggested player – Robinson – was being tested by the Dodgers' farm club, the Montreal Royals.

Smith allegedly did not keep the traditional journalistic distance from Rickey, who had received favorable notice in Smith's column even when the Dodgers general manager announced that year he was going to start his own version of the Negro Leagues. Most of the other Negro press sportswriters panned Rickey and his idea.

Smith and other Negro press sportswriters accompanied Robinson on the road through his first Dodger season, assisting him in the Jim Crow South, where he could not travel with the team. The Dodger and the sportswriters became good friends.

Bar buddies?

"They were soul brothers and very different types of people," said Cunningham of Smith and Robinson.

While Smith, the extrovert, was a drinker and a "life-of-the-party" type, she recalled, Robinson, the introvert, "was none of those things. [He] never was. That was not his thing at all."

"In fact, I often wondered, I said, There must have been days when they really were bored with each other, 'cause, you know, they were together so much....I can't imagine Jackie going out, hanging out all night with Wendell. No way." Cunningham said the Dodgers' star was quiet, committed and strong, but did not have a great sense of humor.

Syndicated columnist TODD BURROUGHS is a PhD candidate at the University of Maryland in College Park.

Letters to The Post

Where's the value on lives of African Americans?

Repeated incidents such as the death of the woman near State Street hopefully will cause us to think about the value put on our own and our children's lives. If we don't show concern, why should we expect anyone else to. In your own way, I ask that you let others know your concern. Maybe you will telephone the media, the internal investigation division, burn your head lights or wear a black, green and red ribbon. Black folks wake up, this could have been you, your daughter or your mother.

Over the last week, Charlotte has been riveted with tragic and disappointing events. Two promising teenagers lost their lives perhaps caused by inexperience and the council dealt a blow to the Arts and Science Council by stopping funding for specific programs that depict homosexuality. The concern showed by the community in both situations have been very visual and vocal. When the two teenagers were killed last week, telephone calls to the media, the state and local governments were at an all time high. People even called the governor to show support for his signing of the bill calling for more training before young people get their full-fledged drivers license. When the council voted to stop funding of some Arts and Science Council programs, the outcry could be heard everywhere. It resounds ever so loudly today, as three large corporations, First Union, Duke Power and NationsBank, band together to unseat some of those same council members.

Should we show any less concern about the latest unnecessary death of the woman who was a passenger in a car driven by someone else? All day long, people brought flowers by the site where the teenagers lost their lives as a sign of concern and sympathy. As I drove by the site where the woman was killed there were no visible signs that anything had even happened there...much less a tragic unnecessary death. How does this speak to our youth? Are we telling them that in Charlotte, N.C. when an African American dies...nobody cares?

B.J. McKinney
Charlotte

Soul of America

The soul of America is in trouble. The family that weathered the worst, most turbulent storms of any ethnic group in America's history is finally displaying ominous signs of unraveling, of losing its very soul; a soul that for centuries gave light to the country and to the world.

For centuries, Africa's seed on the North American continent braved calamities and assaults that by all rules of mortal endurance and logic should have destroyed it. America's dark and beautiful offspring managed, by the grace of God, to emerge from slavery, lynchings, Jim Crow, duplicitous court rulings, hostile government decisions, whole town burnings, and strikes on individual and group esteem, morally unscathed and intact. Or at least that is what we thought 25 or 30 years ago.

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What's on your mind?

Send your comments to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144, Charlotte, N.C. 28230 or fax (704) 342-2160. You can also use E-mail – charpost@clt.mindspring.com All correspondence must include a daytime telephone number for verification.