

Accrued interest in America

MELDYE MICERE STEWART

In the spirit of Ma'at



In 1995, on the occasion of the Million Man March, President Clinton told the nation, "White racism is black people's burden, but white people's problem. We must clean our house of racism."

In 1997, while observing the 40th anniversary of the integration of Central High School by the Little Rock Nine in Arkansas, President Clinton openly admitted that racism still exists in these United States of America. He noted the still wide gulf between blacks and whites, supported by a sad litany of statistics, once again showing that too many African Americans are not doing very well.

President Clinton's efforts to place the enormous task of race relations on the public agenda has been met with controversy, hostility and shameful ignorance. The issue of a national apology for African Americans was formally proposed by white congressman Tony Hill, an Ohio Democrat who wrote a one-sentence apology; he remains baffled at the nation's unsupportive response. Even more baffling: the shameful ambivalence of various black leaders and organizations. So-called conservative blacks continue to attack the measure, along with affirmative action and any other program designed to help ameliorate centuries of injustice.

While many African Americans would agree that a formal apology for the brutal enslavement of our ancestors is due, just as many are ambivalent about the question of reparations. For the record, our ancestors built this nation without compensation. We are the descendants of the primary economic antecedent for this country's global dominance today. Part of the public retreat on a national apology is designed to bury any discussion of overdue compensation for the sons and daughters of slaves.

Yet, we must discuss both the apology and reparations. If you feel it's been too long to suggest an apology and reparations are appropriate for the descendants of enslaved Africans, check your recent family history. My father is 87 and his parents were born into slavery. It ain't be'n dat long! If you think it's been too long to demand what rightfully belonged to your grandparents and/or great grandparents, then ask the Jewish relatives of the Holocaust if 50 years is too long to retrieve what is rightfully theirs. They will tell you, It ain't be'n dat long! This past July, after two years of political pressure, Swiss bankers were prodded to publish the names of dormant bank holder accounts from the World War II era. Some Jewish groups are claiming that up to \$7 billion in assets and accrued interest has been hidden from them.

Certainly, African Americans have accrued interest in the building, development and advancement of this country as the economic and political superpower of the world. In describing our legitimate claim to this country - its land, wealth and resources, W.E.B. DuBois put it this way: "Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song - soft, stirring melody in an ill harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire 200 earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit..."

Swann case may be reopened

Response to parent suit against CMS

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ratio is roughly 40 percent black, and students are bused cross-town to maintain it. More blacks bear the busing burden and some southeast Charlotte schools have less than 10 percent black student populations.

At some schools, the odds for white admission is lower than for blacks, since fewer blacks apply for the open slots. Magnet schools sometimes have open seats because not enough students of one race are available to fill seats reserved for that race.

Black Political Caucus chairman Bob Davis said his group supports the reopening of Swann because a successful Capachione lawsuit would re-segregate the school.

"I just believe it is necessary that we continue to press for integrated schools," said Davis. "If we allow this new suit to come about, it can turn back the clock even more than it is now."

Davis was a member of a school system task force which recommended continued integration of schools, but some changes in busing, including shorter bus rides and strategic construction of new schools.

"Neighborhood schools would be a direct return to segregation," Davis said. "I am opposed to resegregation."

Enterprise building communities

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Ramsey said during a visit to Charlotte last week that he hired Washington after hearing from local neighborhood groups that Washington had worked on their behalf.

The operating grant program came about because the neighborhood organizations said they were spending too much time raising operating funds, Ramsey said. "We wanted to provide stable funding for the organizations," he said.

"They also said they wanted to work closely with city government...that's why Steve was hired. He used to work with the city. The neighborhood people said he was one person we could work with."

Washington said the foundation has five major services in Charlotte, one of 14 such local offices around the country.

"First, we provide operating dollars," Washington said. "Those are the hardest to get. CDCs can usually loan dollars, but we give them money to keep doors open and keep lights on. We also provide loans. We are in the process of reviewing (applications) now. The loans are for housing development. The CDCs can acquire property to rent or sell."

"We also provide training. I have had 11 training sessions for CDCs, but we also invite churches and economic developers, to spread beyond six communities."

Other services, Washington said, include technical assistance and a community safety program to complement revitalization efforts.

"All the communities have a high percentage of female-headed households," he said. "They are very concerned with safety."

Safety projects include street lights which can't be shot out in Belmont and fencing around renovated homes in other areas.

"We want to make it as holistic as possible," Washington said.

The Enterprise Foundation is working with the Reid Park, Belmont, Wilmore, Grier Heights and Lakewood communities, in addition to the more broadly-

"I served on the Committee of 31. We talked about distance and time...as long as we can control distance and time, we need to have integrated schools."

Davis said the long term solution is for the community to do more to integrate neighborhoods. "If there are some neighborhoods that have sufficient integration, let them have stand alone schools," he said.

"Realty companies and the business community are going to have to encourage people to live where they can afford to live, regardless of race. They need to discourage white flight."

Davis said the community must also rebuild and rehabilitate older school buildings.

"What the African American community and others that have good will must do is insist that there be a baseline, that those schools in the inner city and west-side areas be fixed before we build new schools. We talked about equity in facilities. That's the reason we signed off on the (\$450 million upcoming school bond referendum), is that there was an implied promise that that would be done."

The Capachione lawsuit and the opposing Swann request comes as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools and school districts across the country face increasing challenges to busing for integration.

In some communities, such as Oklahoma City, Okla., and

Denver, Colo., school system have returned by court-order or voluntarily to neighborhood schools.

African American parents have sometimes joined the push for neighborhood schools, saying they are frustrated by cross-town bus rides for their children and persistent lack of achievement results.

A growing number of black parents are sending their children to private schools, including the newly created charter schools which are eligible for some public funding as long as they meet state-mandated achievement goals.

The U.S. Supreme Court on April 20, 1971 unanimously upheld U.S. District Judge James McMillan's busing order, establishing the first court-ordered busing plan in the country.

However, since, increasingly conservative federal courts have moved away from the busing remedy.

In Charlotte, the continued reassignment of students to maintain racial balance in the schools has sparked some of the most emotional debates in the city's history.

And the call for neighborhood schools invariably intrudes into related political decisions, form bond referendums to county commissioners' elections.

The school board recently put in place a pupil assignment oversight committee as the reassignment of middle and elementary students looms on the horizon.

hoods and help build the organizations."

based Northwest Corridor CDC.

The organization's Charlotte advisory board includes Madine Fails of the Urban League; Ron Fisher, First Union Bank senior vice president; Chester Williams, BB&T senior vice president; Lynn Walker, First Citizens Bank vice president; Joe Crocker, Wachovia Bank vice president and Greg Hettrick, NationsBank vice president. Other members include Del Borgsdorf, deputy Charlotte city manager and Robert Schurmeier, deputy police chief.

Ramsey said the Charlotte efforts are part of The Enterprise Foundation nationwide commitment to revitalize the nation's inner cities.

Other local offices are in New York City, Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, East Palo Alto, Calif., Los Angeles, San Antonio, Texas, Portland, Ore., Syracuse, N.Y., and Washington, D.C.

The Enterprise Foundation was founded by developer James Rouse and his wife, Patty. James Rouse, best known for building the first indoor shopping mall and Baltimore's Inner Harbor, died last year.

Each of the Enterprise Foundation projects are tailored to the local communities and require an invitation and continued cooperation with local governments and neighborhoods.

"We are in this for the long haul," Ramsey said. "We are a catalyst for making things happen. We build on the assets of the particular neighborhoods. We go in and build on what they have...work with neighborhood groups that know the neighbor-

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In her books, Connie Briscoe deals with the struggle of facing and overcoming adversity. In her life, she's done the same thing. Afflicted with a gradually worsening hearing impairment since birth, Briscoe has never let that or anything else stop her from achieving her goals. Her first novel, *Sisters and Lovers*, sold over 425,000 copies. It is currently in production as a television miniseries.

Connie Briscoe has a way with words, even if she can't hear them.

Connie's most recent novel, *Big Girls Don't Cry* deals with the issues faced by a young black woman determined to be successful both professionally and romantically.

Come see this exceptional author on Thursday, October 23, 7:30pm at the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center's Booth Theater, followed by an autographing reception in the theater lobby.

Connie Briscoe's presentation at the Novello Festival of Reading is sponsored by The Charlotte Post. The autographing reception is sponsored by Heritage House Books & Gifts. Tickets \$10. Call 336-2945.

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