

## The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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# Want to be free? Come go with me

By James Clingman  
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

I can hear Harriet Tubman uttering those words. She risked her own liberty and her life as well, to help those who were still enslaved.

She had the right message, just as David Walker had the right message in his famous David Walker's Appeal, both to his enslaved brothers and sisters and to those who enslaved them. The message was simple. "If you want to be free, come and go with me." The opposite of that is, of course, if you want to be a slave, stay where you are. Isn't it funny how the same things that were spoken back then, still apply to black people today?

Frederick Douglass shed light on what freedom is when he said the turning point in his life as a slave was deciding to fight back and not allow himself to be whipped by Edward Covey. After defeating Covey by fighting back, Douglass said, "I was nothing before ... I was a man now." The experience of fighting back made Douglass even more determined to be a free man. He described a feeling he never had before, a feeling of being released from the "tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom."

He went on to say, "My long crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I remained a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping [me], must also succeed in killing me."

Harriet risked her life by going back to rescue slaves. David Walker risked his life by writing his famous Appeal; he died shortly thereafter, some saying he was poisoned. Frederick Douglass risked his life by standing up and physically fighting back against mistreatment. Accounts of similar actions by African-Americans abound and certainly should be discussed in our homes and in our schools, especially during Black History Month.

More importantly, however, are the lessons we can learn from the strength and tenacity of our ancestors. We must look at their actions and utilize them in our daily lives. We must listen to them and hear their plea to us, their children, the ones for whom they suffered, survived, sacrificed, and died. They are still telling us, "If you want to be free, come and go with me."

We say the same thing today. Do we want to be free? If we do, shouldn't we follow those who are leading the way to freedom, rather than those who are keeping us enslaved? We know quite well that the "establishment" wants the status quo, and we can look back in history and see how the system changed to accommodate the desires of the powerful vis-à-vis maintaining status quo. For instance, five years after the Civil War, according to Amos Wilson, the percentage of Blacks in prison went from nearly zero to more than 33 percent. Even though Black people were so-called "free" the Establishment still figured out how to enslave us, the 13th Amendment notwithstanding.

Take a look at the Civil Rights period. We fought for the right to spend our money wherever we wanted and, despite the resistance of the Establishment, we finally won that right (I said, "Right" not "Privilege"). The economic system quickly came up with ways to see that we could do exactly what we had fought for. They started making all sorts of trinkets and clothing to sell to us, setting up jobs programs for us, building barracks-style and high-rise housing for us, and designing a state-of-the-art welfare system that would surely destroy our family structure, all in an ongoing effort to make us their economic slaves. We should have listened to and heeded Harriet's words.

So what do we do in 2004 if we really want to be free? And, by the way, I can hear some brothers and sisters right now saying, "I am free; I don't need to do anything." They are obviously the remnant of those who told Harriet they would rather stay where they were than to go with her, and they are probably the reason she said she could have freed more slaves if they had simply known they were slaves. Nevertheless, for those of us who know we are still not free, what are we going to do about it?

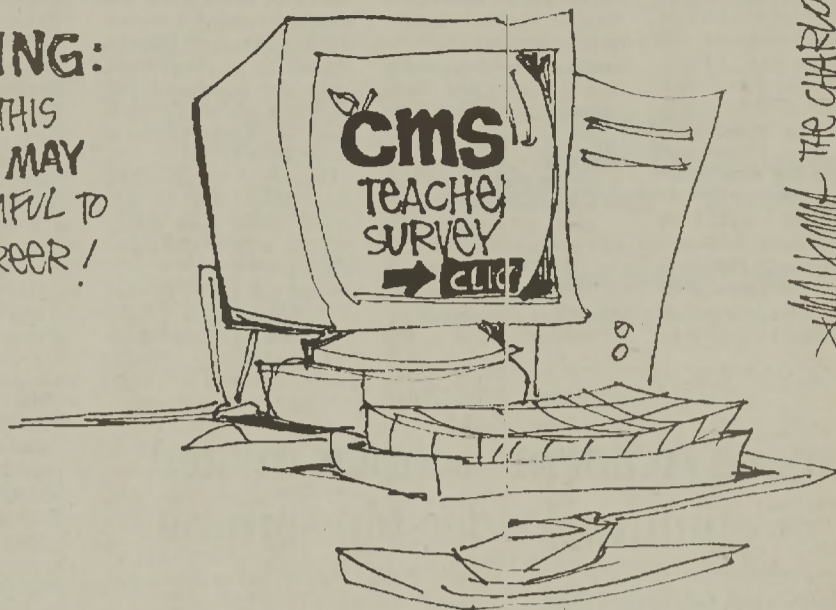
First, I think we had better stop our mindless, blind, and lemming-like behavior when it comes to some of those we call leaders. They are enslaved, and they are busy trying to keep us that way. Then, we must find the Harriets, Fredericks, and David Walkers among us who are willing and able to lead us to true freedom. Those among us who are dedicated to and have an understanding of where we must really go to obtain freedom are the ones we should be following and helping.

Those who are willing to make sacrifices like Marcus Garvey, those who are willing to stand up and speak out like Malcolm X, those who are willing to design and execute bold economic strategies like Reginald Lewis and Ken Bridges, those who are fearless and selfless like Medgar Evers, are the ones we need to follow today. They are saying the same thing our ancestors said: "If you want to be free, come and go with me."

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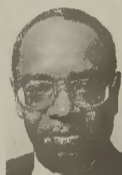
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## Promises to keep before we go to sleep

GERALD O. JOHNSON



I recently toured the extraordinary "Conversations of Courage" exhibit on display at the Levine Museum of the New South. The exhibit commemorates the Carolina roots of the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* that mandated the end of segregated public education in the United States.

Interestingly, this case started because the school board chairman of Clarendon County, S.C., refused a request from black families for a school bus to keep their kids from walking nine miles to school.

As we celebrate the 50-year anniversary of this landmark decision the school bus still remains at the heart of controversy between the haves and the have-nots. The exhibit is a vivid

reminder of why African American parents have reservations about separate but equal policies.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, after being declared a unitary system by the courts officially abandoned busing for desegregation in 2001. The busing program was replaced with a parent assignment program ("Choice"). The Choice program as predicted is leading to a re-segregation of CMS. Because of the predictability of what Choice would lead to, promises were made to give high-need schools the necessary resources (especially quality teachers) to guarantee students would still be able to realize their educational potential.

This promise, as feared, may get compromised. Pressures from well-organized suburban parent groups are asking for more schools to be built in the suburbs. County commissioners are still in favor of a no tax increase policy. If the School Board agrees with suburban

parents, the result would lead to a shifting of funds away from high-need schools to high-growth communities. This shift would result in renegeing on promises made to high need schools.

This whole situation leaves the school board in a very precarious predicament. Just by the very nature of a Choice program (neighborhood schools), schools should be built in areas where the children are. But doing this at the expense of high need schools will generate a whole new set of problems to be dealt with.

First, it can be assumed that the African American community will not lend support to pass school bonds in the near future. History has demonstrated that shifting away from bond priorities usually comes at the expense of the African American community. Some in the community are beginning to drum up support to rally against any future bond referendum.

Secondly, but even more

important is the door left opened by Judge Robert Potter's ruling declaring CMS a unitary system. If it can be demonstrated a child is not receiving equal educational opportunities at the school he or she is attending in relationship to other schools in the system, then the courts will review the situation.

Choice opens the door for separate and unequal schools. It is going to require vigilance and diligence to keep us from repeating the mistakes of the past. We have created an environment that has the potential to be both emotionally and financially explosive. Keeping a lid on the situation is going to be crucial. It wouldn't be a bad idea for the school board and county commissioners to tour the "Conversations of Courage" exhibit as a reminder of what was and the predictor of what can be.

GERALD O. JOHNSON is publisher of *The Post*.

## American weapons of mass denial

GEORGE E. CURRY



David Kay, the expert tapped by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency to serve as the chief nuclear weapons inspector in Iraq, couldn't have been more direct in his recent report: There are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

In an interview with Reuters News Service, Kay was asked: "What happened to the stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons that everyone suspected to be there [in Iraq]?"

He replied, "I don't think they existed."

What is clear from Kay as well as newly declassified CIA documents is that the basic rationale for last year's preemptive strike against Iraq was flawed because there was nothing to preempt.

Rather than face up to having misled the U.S., the U.N. and the world, Bush and his top advisers are essentially playing a childish, though deadly, game of what has been described as I-hit-him-before-he-could-hit me.

"I repeat to you what I strongly believe: that inaction in Iraq would have emboldened Saddam Hussein," Bush said last Sunday on "Meet the Press." The president continued, "He could have developed, you know, a nuclear weapon over time. I'm not saying

immediately, but over time. Which would then have put us in what position? We would have been in a position of blackmail."

Bush knew exactly what he was doing when he ordered the unprovoked attack on Iraq. Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of media studies at New York University, said by shifting the nation's attention from domestic issues to foreign affairs, Bush went "From Bozo to Churchill."

Writing in his book, "The Bush Dyslexicon: Observations of a National Disorder," Miller observed: "...before you knew it, the seeming bozo was our savior. Not only were his famous foibles magically erased, but Bush's entire political pre-history also slipped right down the memory hole - the fraud and thuggery in Florida, the Supreme Court's complicity, the appointment of John Ashcroft, the budget-busting tax cuts, the moves against Social Security, the screw-you foreign policy, the slash-and-burn environmental policy, the lame prescription drug plan, the Jeffords controversy, California's power black-outs, Dick Cheney's Enron black-out and the many other signs of Big Oil's toxic spread, and on and on."

Regrettably, the media served as willing co-conspirators.

CBS anchorman Dan Rather said to late night show host Dave Letterman on September 18, 2001: "George Bush is the president. He makes the deci-

sions - and you know, as just one American, he wants me to line up, just tell me where. He makes the call."

Newsweek's Howard Fineman was equally effusive, saying Bush was "a model of unblinking, eyes-on-the-prize decisiveness." Fineman described Bush as "commanding," "astute" and "eloquent."

George Bush, eloquent? Not in this lifetime.

While Bush was re-crafting his public image, aided by a cheerleading media, little attention was paid to why we really went to war.

Former Secretary of Treasury Paul O'Neill was criticized by the Bush administration for stating that Bush was determined to get Saddam Hussein at all costs.

"From the very beginning, there was a conviction that Saddam Hussein is a bad person and that he needed to go," O'Neill said on the television program "60 Minutes." He explained, "From the very first instance, it was about Iraq. It was about what we can do to change this regime."

O'Neill wasn't alone in making that assertion.

David Martin of CBS reported on September 2, 2002: "Barely five hours after American Airlines Flight 77 plowed into the Pentagon, the secretary of defense was telling his aides to start thinking about striking Iraq, even though there was no evidence linking Saddam Hussein to the attacks."

Former Army Gen. Wesley

Clark, appearing on NBC's "Meet the Press" last June, said pretty much the same thing.

CLARK: There was a concerted effort during the fall of 2001, starting immediately after 9/11, to pin 9/11 and the terrorism problem on Saddam Hussein.

TIM RUSSERT: By who? Who did that?

CLARK: Well, it came from the White House, it came from people around the White House. It came from all over. I got a call on 9/11. I was on CNN, and I got a call at my home saying, "You got to say this connected. This is state-sponsored terrorism. This has to be connected to Saddam Hussein." I said, "But - I'm willing to say it, but what's your evidence?" And I never got any evidence.

Clark didn't get any evidence because there was none.

Rather than holding Bush and his top officials accountable, the media is allowing them to say, in effect, that it doesn't matter why we went to war as long as the U.S. ousted Saddam Hussein.

Speaking in Charleston, S.C., Bush said, "Knowing what I knew then and knowing what I know today, America did the right thing in Iraq."

That's the real intelligence failure.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. His most recent book is "The Best of Emerge Magazine," published by Ballantine Books.