

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

1531 Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203

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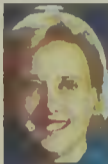
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EDITORIALS

Lynching 'apology' shows true colors

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate voted for a non-binding resolution apologizing for its failure to pass legislation that would have made lynching a federal offense.

The sponsors, Sens. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) and George Allen (R-Va.) no doubt had their hearts in the right place when they brought the measure up. But it's too little, too late. An apology — even a non-binding one — is a good gesture in terms of acknowledging the Senate's role as accomplice in the shameful role lynching had in southern states until the late 1960s. Research at Tuskegee University, a predominantly black college in Alabama, confirms 4,743 black Americans were lynched, which doesn't include those who never were accounted for.



Landrieu

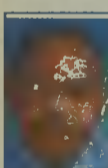
On three separate occasions in the 20th century, the House of Representatives passed anti-lynching legislation, but similar measures never made it to a vote in the upper chamber because powerful southern senators — usually Democrats — made it a point to filibuster each and every one. Without southern support, the measures died. In the meantime, "strange fruit" as the singer Billie Holiday called black bodies swinging from trees in the South, continued to bear.

Lynching is no longer a national issue, but it's ironic that 15 senators — mostly Republicans — couldn't find the decency to support an apology that doesn't carry the weight of law or compensation for the victims or their families. Eighteen senators threw their support behind the measure after checking the political winds on the day of the vote, including North Carolina's Elizabeth Dole. Ironically, her husband, former Sen. Robert Dole, was among the few Senate Republicans who consistently graded beyond an "F" on civil rights matters.

It is amazing that in 2005, there are people in positions of power who are too timid or mean-spirited to even acknowledge the wrongs done in the name of maintaining the status quo in this society. America's history is replete with brave and heroic acts by all its peoples, but it has its share of shame, too. Lynching is an atrocity that proves humankind's horror against itself. The Senate, unfortunately, can't even unanimously agree that it was worth a collective "our bad" for its own callousness when facing an opportunity to address the issue. Maybe the chamber should've held a roll call vote to let the country and the world know exactly where each member stood on the issue. But that would've taken some courage, wouldn't it?

At Pughsley's retirement, CMS needs to move ahead

Today is Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent James Pughsley's final official day on the job. It's worth noting that Mr. Pughsley has been a good steward of public education in the district, and his service deserves our thanks.



Pughsley

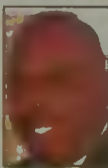
During Mr. Pughsley's three years leading the state's largest school district, challenges arose that would've crushed a lesser individual. Overcrowding, discipline and academic achievement of low-income students are now flashpoints. Mr. Pughsley had to juggle competing regional philosophies on what's best for CMS and a dysfunctional school board that still hasn't developed a clear vision for the district's future.

But it isn't too late for CMS to get its act together. First, the board should take the due diligence to develop a clear-cut roadmap for the overall education experience in public schools. It should also take time to recruit a new superintendent who can deliver on that vision. Interim superintendent Frances Haithcock was an excellent choice to lead the district, and although she hasn't expressed interest in the position, has the skills and personality to handle it.

Regardless of where the superintendent search leads, CMS needs to get it right. The board also needs to get its act together in solving the issues that threaten to put the district in a no-win situation that leads to further erosion of public confidence.

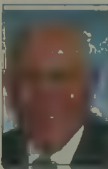
Legal reality leaves N.C. no choice on minority vendors

North Carolina lawmakers are mulling a bill that would move the state from a race and gender-based vendor program for highway contracts to a small-business model that would open the field to a wider demographic. Of course, that doesn't sit well with black contractors, who say it's an attempt to erode a tenuous grasp of N.C. DOT business.



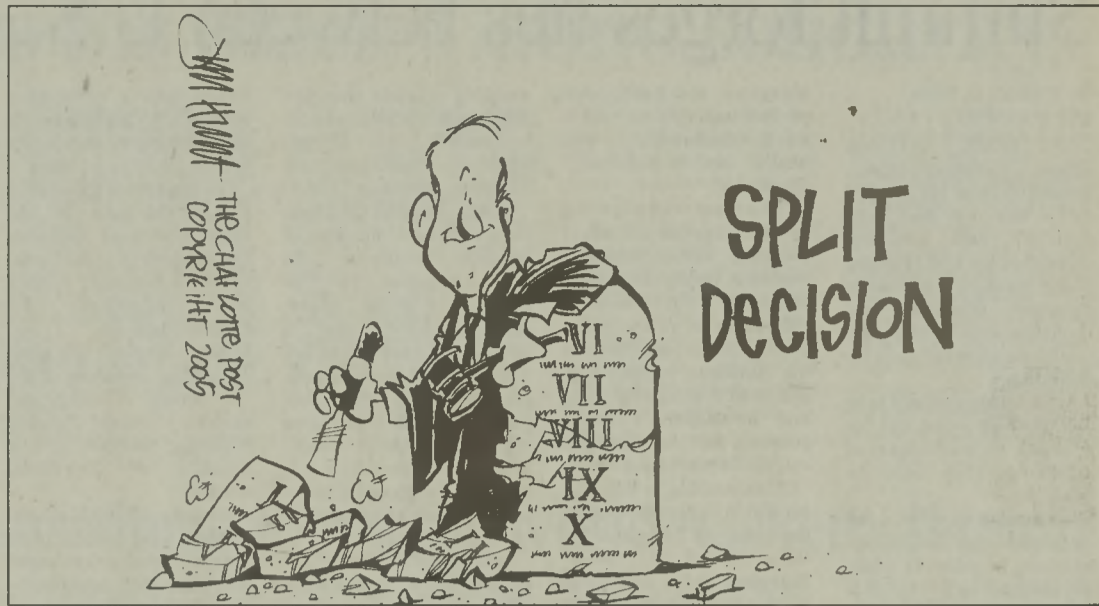
Graham

The bill, sponsored by N.C. Sens. Malcolm Graham and Charlie Dannelly of Charlotte would remove race-based goals from the vendor program, which have proven to be on slippery legal footing in recent years. In order to keep the state out of court on the issue, Dannelly and Graham argue, North Carolina has little recourse other than take race out of the equation.



Dannelly

Legally, the state doesn't have much choice, considering the conservative climate in state and federal courts these days. In facing that reality, we believe the state should do more to ensure that small businesses — especially those that historically have been underutilized — get the help and incentives necessary to continue and build upon their role as suppliers to DOT.



MATTERS OF OPINION

Declaration of war on the black press

GEORGE E. CURRY



CHICAGO — When the National Newspaper Publishers Association held its 65th annual convention here last week, there was one topic that overshadowed the usual maneuverings to elect a new president and the perennial concern about the failure of major corporations that rely on black consumers to advertise in black newspapers. The burning issue this year — and I do mean burning — was the disclosure that the New York Times plans to start an African-American newspaper in Gainesville, Fla.

Black publishers freely concede that anyone has the right to start a newspaper. That is not the issue. What is so galling is that white-owned media companies that have done such an embarrassingly poor job of accurately portraying people of color on their pages and broadcast outlets are now seeking to supplant the only legitimate black media voices that have performed that task admirably for more than a century. It is arrogant and ridiculous to think that newspapers that primarily portray African-Americans as criminals, athletes and entertainers will suddenly be able or willing to present African-Americans in their full com-

plexity.

Equally culpable are companies that refuse to advertise in black-owned media but are willing to place ads with white-owned publications, broadcasts and Internet outlets targeting African-Americans. They should be publicly exposed and boycotted. In fact, every black newspaper should identify them each week so that African-Americans will be able to support only corporations that respect and support them.

The New York Times' decision to compete with black newspapers is all about money. Daily newspapers have been losing circulation for more than a decade, more classified ads are shifting to online portals and conglomerates that purchase media 'properties' are pressuring them to become more profitable. The Project for Excellence in Journalism at Columbia University reports that only 22 corporations control 70 percent of daily newspaper circulation. As a consequence of mergers and declining circulation, what often gets passed on to readers as news is pabulum.

There is also the issue of changing demographics. In 50 years, whites are projected to become a minority in this country for the first time. Over that same period, the U.S. population is expected to grow by 50 percent, with 90 percent of that growth being among people of color. So for economic reasons — this has nothing to do with altruism

— the New York Times, NBC, Times Warner and other media giants are eager to add black and Latino publications and stations to their portfolio. We've already seen this with Time, Inc.'s decision to purchase Essence magazine, Viacom's purchase of Black Entertainment Television, American Online's ownership of Africana.com and Blackvoices.com, and a decision by NBC, a subsidiary of General Electric Co., to purchase Telemundo, a U.S. Spanish-speaking cable network, in 2001 for \$2.7 billion.

One of the most important characteristics of the black press is that it is a trusted source for news and perspectives. Readers turn to the Black Press to get an alternative to white-owned media that routinely parrot the Establishment view and don't offer, let alone understand, alternative perspectives.

In 1978, the American Society of Newspaper Editors established a goal for the year 2000 of having newsroom employment be "equivalent to the percentage of minority persons in the national population." Although African-Americans represent 12.5 percent of the population, Blacks are only 5.4 percent of the nation's newsrooms, according to a survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Instead of achieving those goals, ASNE's solution was to push the target date back to 2025.

Rather than trying to supplant black and Latino publications, white-owned media

companies should show that they can improve their unbalanced coverage and increase African-American presence at all levels within their organizations. According to a recent Knight Foundation study, people of color make up 30.9 percent of the New York Times' circulation area. However, they comprise only 16.7 percent of the Times' newsroom.

The paper's first responsibility should be to have its newsroom mirror the diversity of the community it is pledged to serve. If that happens, perhaps we will see more well-rounded portrayals of people of color. In the meantime, buying or creating black newspapers does not absolve white-owned media companies of that responsibility.

In 1827, Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm, founders of Freedom's Journal, the nation's first Black newspaper, proclaimed: "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us." Black people don't need the New York Times or any other white-owned media company to speak for us. We do that quite well ourselves.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. He appears on National Public Radio three times a week as part of "News and Notes with Ed Gordon."

To contact Curry or to book him for a speaking engagement, go to his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.

Some life-changing statistics on AIDS

By Phill Wilson
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Whether you noticed or not, something happened last week that ought to change your life. It should rank among those lifelong milestones, the ones where you always remember what you were doing when you found out. And no, I'm not talking about Michael Jackson's acquittal.

On Monday, June 12, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that African-Americans represent about half of all people living with HIV in the country. Half. We're only 13 percent of the population. We already know three quarters of new female infections are among African-American women, who are getting HIV largely through sex.

It gets worse. CDC also revealed a study—the first in a series that the agency hopes will give us unprecedented specifics about the number and nature of HIV infections in America—suggesting that half of all Black homosexual and bisexual men are already positive.

Meanwhile, improvements we once saw among youth are reversing. After declining by

30 percent throughout the 1990s, the number of new HIV infections among young men of all races shot up 41 percent between 1999 and 2003.

For more than two decades now, AIDS activists have rightly asserted that this is not just any other disease. It's a virus that preys upon the most marginalized in our society. As a result, infection continues to carry great deals of stigma. It is, after all, a sexually transmitted disease, and one that is most likely to affect those who are having anal sex or using drugs.

But on June 12 we entered a new era. We can no longer afford to trifle with the politics of America's culture wars, whether they come from the left or the right. It is time that everyone, particularly African-Americans, take responsibility for this monster's longevity. Individuals, community organizers and policymakers must all begin to hold themselves accountable.

As individuals, two things are clear. First, every African-American who does not know whether he or she is HIV positive or negative has the ability to find out. Free, confidential testing is available in every part of this country. Go

find out your status. Be accountable. Second, every one of us who knows we are HIV positive have the ability to stop the virus' spread, to not allow ourselves to be a link in the insidious chain. Similarly, everyone who is negative has the ability to stay that way, by taking responsibility for your own health. Be accountable.

The community organizers who have rightly taken the lead in HIV prevention to date must also accept the new reality. We can no longer afford to spend our limited resources on initiatives that just make us all feel good. Our prevention campaigns must be accountable to scientific standards; if we can't show they work then we need to put our resources into what does.

But accountability doesn't stop there. Individuals and communities need support in their efforts, and government—at both local and national levels—must be a far more responsible partner than it has been so far.

The White House is pushing a \$4 million cut to the CDC's HIV and STD prevention budget for the coming fiscal year. That comes after two previous years of cutting an already measly budget. This

as Washington prepares to hand out yet another round of billions of dollars in tax cuts to the wealthy.

Meanwhile, religion and politics rather than science continue to guide the federal government's role in prevention. An early 1990s regulation prevents the CDC from funding any prevention campaign deemed to "promote" sex. Right-wing legislators have repeatedly used the bizarre rule to browbeat any community group trying to develop innovative interventions that speak honestly about what is, I repeat, a sexually transmitted disease.

Washington has also begun shoving aside the school-based comprehensive sex education that has proven effective, in favor of unproven abstinence-only curricula—which forbids any discussion of how to use a condom or avoid STDs once you are sexually active. Politicians must get out of the way and let science rule the day, and we must hold them accountable when they don't.

PHILL WILSON is founder and executive director of the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles. Wilson has been living with HIV for 23 years. He can be reached at phillw@BlackAIDS.org.