

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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OUR VIEW

Bettering schools requires sacrifice, money and time

With the start of another academic year in Charlotte-Mecklenburg comes another set of challenges for students. However, the annual challenge facing adults — how to improve the school district — continues to elude us.

The good news is that many of Charlotte's political, social and education leaders understand the district is in need of an overhaul. Parents, however, have taken a "not in my back yard" approach to what ails CMS. Too often, we want equity for inner city schools, but not at the expense of suburban students. We want neighborhood schools, but aren't prepared to sacrifice comfort in the name of equality. We want the best-qualified teachers, but won't provide enough incentives to attract them to the schools that need their services most. It's all about want, and it needs to stop.

For a community that makes a habit out of what others think of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we've done a poor job on the public schools. Test scores have made some improvement, but there's little gain on the academic gulf between African Americans and CMS as a whole. Schools in mostly black and brown sections of the county still make do with less-experienced teachers and administrators who struggle to navigate CMS's bureaucratic maze. And the school board itself could use a clue or two about building a consensus when it comes to decision-making.

With all due respect to Judge Howard Manning, who presides over the long-running Leandro case, Charlotte-Mecklenburg's difficulties will only worsen until parents and taxpayers understand that the county's future and economic stature is in peril without change. That means finding solutions that, unfortunately, will require money. Recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced teachers, especially in the inner city. Lawmakers need to support pending legislation that would make it easier for North Carolina to hire qualified teachers from other states. Businesses can join the education community to put some of their best and brightest in classrooms as mentors, if not teachers.

Improving public education won't be easy. It won't be cheap, either. In the end, though, we don't have much choice.

LETTERS

True birth control starts with abstinence

I read with interest the editorial written by Gerri Cunningham concerning parental notification for birth control (Aug. 4, "Parental notification will force teens underground"). And I would like to submit my viewpoint for your consideration:

Interesting that abstinence was not mentioned at all. Why? It is still an option, isn't it?

When a young person makes this choice, all the worries Gerri mentioned virtually disappear. AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, STDs, emergency contraception, etc. Not to mention the emotional fallout (a very real worry NOT mentioned, by the way).

Abstinence works 100 percent of the time, every time. And, yes, it is realistic. In fact, more and more young people are realizing that it's liberating.

Sure, the prescribing doctor examines the young girl before administering the contraception. Does he/she also "examine" her emotional health and maturity? Does this doctor discuss the fact that birth control pills offer NO protection against deadly

diseases? Do you think he/she mentions that 15 million Americans become infected with STDs each year?

What other important facts is the doctor omitting from his/her "examination"?

Yes, it is "awkward and frightening" telling your parents — there's a reason for that. Any parent committed to their child's health and morals would discourage it! Remember when displeasing our parents was something to be dreaded? It's the way healthy families are supposed to function — it's a natural deterrent to making unwise decisions.

Emergency contraception is not "medicine" for pregnancy "sickness." It is serious business. And this is NOT a topic we want to bring in to our public schools.

Lastly, as a parent, I would be crazy to "be confident my child will make the right decision." They won't! Just like I didn't when I was a teenager! Open and honest communication is the firm foundation for all healthy relationships. That's the "reality."

Sharlene Atkins
Charlotte

Make CMS culturally uniform

How can we make a change in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools?

Level the playing field. CMS is a place where many races and cultures meet. They come from many homes with different financial backgrounds. To simply say from the richest families to the poorest families they meet at

CMS.

School uniforms can level the playing field. Dress codes in the business community has proven this point. How we dress affects how we act and feel about ourselves.

Put unity in CMS — take out fear

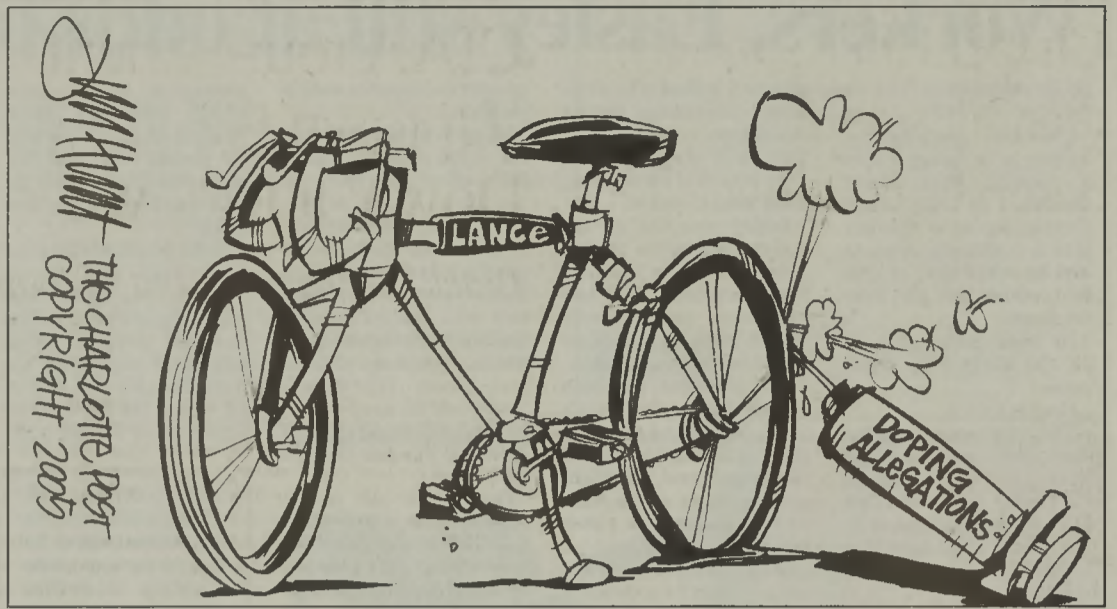
Abigail Adams
Charlotte

Africans as greedy as white folks

White people are greedy ("A plea to Africa's U.S. kin," Aug. 4 Post). That's what the former UN Ambassador Andrew Young says in the cited article. If a white person said that about African Americans, we would call

him racist. Mr. Young should be focusing on the African leaders who literally allow their citizens to starve to death while living in palaces. Now that's greed.

Diana P. Ross
Charlotte



MATTERS OF OPINION

The Farrakhan leadership challenge

GEORGE E. CURRY



Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan created a stir recently when he agreed with a controversial statement made by Mexico's president about immigrants taking low-paying jobs that even African-Americans don't want.

Speaking in Milwaukee earlier this month, Farrakhan said: "Vicente Fox was not wrong when he said the Mexican takes jobs that even blacks in America don't want."

Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton accused Fox of being insensitive and flew to Mexico to tell him so in person. They met with Fox on separate days, holding their own news conference to recount their conversations with Fox. Even after the visits, Fox did not back down from his original statement. Subsequently, he supported the issuance of Mexican stamps that had stereotypical images of black people that was far more insulting than his original statement.

Having witnessed firsthand how Farrakhan's words have been distorted in the past, I decided to request a copy of the Milwaukee speech

from the Nation of Islam. They sent me a CD and DVD of the speech overnight so I could hear Minister Farrakhan's words for myself.

According to a recording of Farrakhan's speech, he asked: "Why are you so foolishly sensitive when somebody is telling the truth?" He drew laughter when he told the audience, "You picked cotton so long, you don't want to see a farm. Even if you own it, you get away from it."



Farrakhan

I, too, thought the Vicente Fox incident was overblown and said so in one of my regular appearances on NPR's "News and Notes with Ed Gordon." I agree that Fox should have been more careful in his word selection. To say that Hispanics were taking jobs that "even" blacks don't want, implied that as far as Americans go, one couldn't get any lower than African-Americans. If you remove the word "even," there's nothing to complain about. The truth is immigrants from Mexico are taking jobs that neither blacks nor whites want.

Having covered civil rights leaders for more than three decades, I know that the most dangerous place on the planet is to stand between some of

them and a TV camera. You take your life into your hands if you do that. Let's be honest and state that the trips by Jackson and Sharpton to Mexico were taken, in part, to gain publicity. I don't doubt their sincerity, but I also know their history. Most of us whisper this among ourselves, but unlike Farrakhan, don't say it publicly.

What bothered me about their trips to Mexico was they undertook Mission Impossible just as the battle over George Bush's next nominee to the Supreme Court was heating up. Given the choice between whether the president of Mexico used imprecise language and the selection to fill a Supreme Court vacancy, Jackson and Sharpton should have headed to Washington, not Mexico City.

This Vicente Fox fiasco points to a need for a more balanced style of national leadership. Seeing the walls of segregation crumble in my hometown of Tuscaloosa, Ala., I am not one to say that marching or street demonstrations are not still needed. But we must insist on fewer publicity gimmicks and more emphasis on the less glamorous work, such as education. We need to not only narrow the achievement gaps between blacks and whites, but between black males and black females. To his credit, Hugh Price tried to steer the

civil rights movement in that direction during his tenure at the National Urban League. Each of the major civil rights groups has major initiatives in education, but no group is doing enough.

Of course, there is the usual rhetoric about providing the same accolades for academic excellence that we as a community provide for athletics. One of the most effective programs is the NAACP's ACT-SO program created by the late Vernon Jarrett. My friend Dr. Donald Suggs has a banquet each year to honor educational excellence in St. Louis and many other local groups have similar programs. But all of us need to do more. A report by the American Council on Education notes that twice as many black women as black men now attend college. That has enormous implications for every aspect of our community. Concentrating on keeping our young people in college and out of the criminal justice trap will be much more rewarding, in the end, than rushing to Mexico for a photo op and press conference.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. He appears on National Public Radio as part of "News and Notes with Ed Gordon."

How to advance the black agenda

A recent trip to Atlanta provided me with mixed experiences. I had a great time in Atlanta at the recent Voting Rights March.

However, a panel discussion at the annual meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists left me with serious concerns.

First, I was concerned that what should have been a plenary on the Voting Rights Act was stuffed into a corner room of the Hyatt Hotel in the sub-basement. But what really concerned me was something that arose in the panel discussion, something I had heard several times before.

There seems to be a feeling that the civil rights movement is dead and that the civil rights leaders should die with it. The argument is that the movement's methods that were okay in the '60s, but outdated today.

For the record, the civil rights movement is not a '60s phenomenon. It is as old as the black community and it resurfaces in each generation to provide the most powerful challenge to the barriers to the Black advancement. As a result of the recent agitation of civil rights leaders, articles

are now being written that assess the Voting Rights Act, evaluating the necessity of its reauthorization. Now, that might have happened if someone had given a great speech, written a letter to the editor, or an op ed piece in the newspapers. I doubt it. It happened because nearly 30,000 people were mobilized to come to Atlanta on August 6 and make their witness in person.

As I write this, a white woman, Cindy Sheehan, is camped outside of the summer home of President George Bush in Crawford, Texas. She is staging a protest against the Iraq war for which she believes her son died needlessly. She has been joined by others in what has turned out to be a media event, with articles being written daily about her agenda. Such methods of getting an agenda before the public are not relegated to a certain era of history, but are used widely by organized labor and others seeking to bring pressure to bear on decision-makers. Should blacks be the only people in America not to use such pressure tactics?

Second, this tiresomeness about the role of civil rights in our lives, I have come to think, exists because some are confused about how pressure leads the public to adopt an agenda. During the '60s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s

staff was very sensitive to the ways in which they could use his presence to make an impact on the media. Indeed, I could argue that we would not have the civil rights laws today, no matter how eloquent was Dr. King, if his exploits and those of others did not create the pressure which forced the white press to write the stories and focus the cameras on such events. This is what influenced the president and members of Congress, and how they eventually took up the issues that were making it hard for them to deal with anything else. In that equation, journalists were central.

Today, journalists are still central, and many black journalists have taken the place of those whites who wrote about the civil rights exploits of the '60s. But the problem today is that many of our journalists are playing the game of their newspapers or television stations in order to maintain their jobs, rather than carrying the civil rights movement right into the newsroom. It is much easier to criticize and caricature Black leaders and then hunker down in the newsroom with colleagues who are also afraid of the pressure they might bring, just to get along. In that sense, it's all about a job, about personal freedom, not the freedom of people who need it.

From that vantage point, some of our journalists are just afraid and sew more confusion into the modern civil rights movement by attempting to be "objective" because objectivity depends on where you stand. If a black journalist stands with the Establishment in their perspective on black life, many studies show that they are likely to perpetuate racist conceptions. But there is also an objectivity in the black mainstream of life that journalist should reflect, as Vernon Jarrett so ably taught.

It's logical to wonder what the politics of confrontation is like in the newsrooms of America where editors and producers assign stories about blacks from the vantage point of an either distorted or otherwise unreal "objectivism." Except every now and then, what I read leads me to the view that there is precious little of the civil rights movement inside media institutions that have the most important role in educating Americans about issues, and influencing the political system to do something about them.

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