

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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EDITORIALS

Think bigger for Charlotte tribute to civil rights icon

There are more than 700 streets and thoroughfares named after Martin Luther King Jr. but none in Charlotte. City council appears ready to change that, but just can't decide how just yet. Monday's 7-4 vote to study the possibility of naming a street after the slain civil rights leader erased the possibility of a quick resolution in time for the national celebration of MLK Day on Monday. But that won't be the end of the story.

City council member James Mitchell, who backs the renaming of Stonewall Street to Martin Luther King Boulevard, makes a good argument for such a move. Stonewall has few residents who would be impacted by a change, in terms of new addresses for drivers' licenses or stationery, for instance. But the city would also incur costs as well, such as changing street signs. That, however, isn't such a big deal, since streets undergo such changes on a fairly consistent basis.

There are concerns that although no one knows how Stonewall came to be, there's a possibility that the street was named after Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, whose widow lived here. That argument may be dubious at best, but let's not nit-pick. Another option may be renaming a portion of Interstate 485 after Dr. King. Nice, but it's been done before.

Instead of naming a street after Dr. King, we encourage city council to think outside the box for a grander gesture. Charlotte business leaders like Bill Lee, John Belk or former Gov. Jim Martin have those honors, which are fitting for local folks. Even Rosa Parks, who defied 1950s southern apartheid to spark the Montgomery Bus Boycott that lifted King to national status, has a street named in her honor here. But Dr. King's contributions went beyond Charlotte's city limits to impact a nation and indeed all humankind, and as such deserves a grander honor.

As an international symbol of human rights and justice, we think naming Charlotte's most international asset — the airport — would be fitting. Willie Ratchford, executive director of the Community Relations Committee, put it best: "I don't see him as a black hero. I see him as an American hero."

Stonewall is an attractive option for a King Boulevard, with the lure of uptown attractions such as Bank of America Stadium and a possible NASCAR Hall of Fame. Independence Boulevard, another potential site, would be OK, too. But no one else in America has a King Airport, and for a city that aspires to greatness, Charlotte should explore the possibilities. Changing the name doesn't impact any residents, the airport is owned by the city, so the process is simple. We'll bet that going with Martin Luther King International Airport has a nice ring to it.

Hip hop finally growing out of its baggy exploitation era

Hip hop, as anyone who follows the music and culture will acknowledge, is the most powerful force in American popular culture. From rappers like Curtis Jackson, also known as 50 Cent to Sean "Diddy" Combs and Lil' Kim, hip hop is, as the kids say "blazin'." But who benefits most from the music and images that kids gravitate toward and parents are repulsed by? It isn't African Americans who invented the music and the lifestyle but don't control the money. Like anything else that becomes big business, corporations make the money and rules.



50 Cent

Although artists like Ice Cube, Will Smith and Ice-T have have transitioned from rappers to multimedia stars, the people who own the record companies and sell the apparel often don't look like them. Consider this: Hip hop/rap is the top-selling genre of music in the U.S., but only 30 percent of it is sold to African Americans. Who's buying the rest? Middle class white kids.

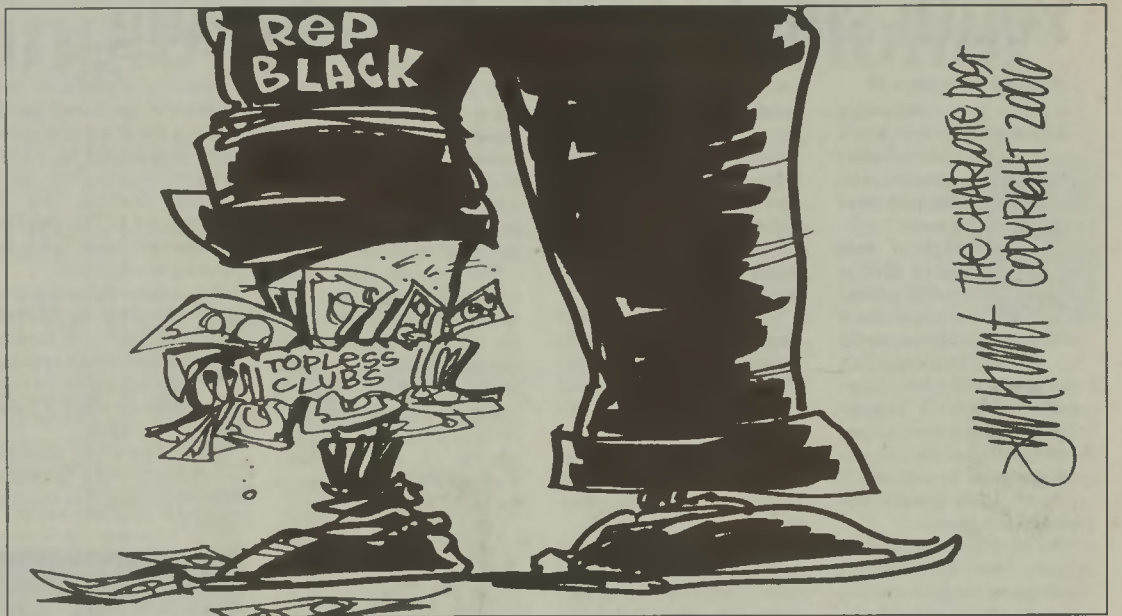
Same with apparel. From FUBU sweatshirts to Timberland shoes, the proceeds from urban wear isn't going to the 'hood, it's going to corporate headquarters, where top managers and CEOs reap the rewards. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the top commodity in the hip-hop game is street credibility, which is what young African Americans provide. Without that, RocaWear is just something to wear and Kangol is a hat for old guys.

Why bring this up? When an image of young black folks is offered to the world as the standard of their worth, it's unsettling to have it linked to the bottom line. Young people may be attracted to baggy clothes or platinum jewelry because their favorite rapper/actor/tough guy rocks it, but we should take care to acknowledge that is only an image. Heck, if Diddy, Fitty and Jay-Z are dressing more like CEOs than street thugs, surely they understand the power in grown-up apparel. As trends go, Fogey Nation can only hope and pray that their followers can learn something from it.

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Judge Alito's record on civil wrongs

As the Senate Judiciary Committee examines the fitness of U.S. Appeals Court Judge Samuel A. Alito Jr. to replace



George E. Curry
rights groups are opposing Alito's nomination simply because he is a conservative.

However, a careful reading of special reports compiled by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) and the Alliance for Justice shows that they have legitimate concerns about Alito's staunch opposition to civil rights and his eagerness to limit the power Congress has to remedy racial discrimination.

"Judge Alito's 1985 application to be the Reagan administration's Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Office of Legal Counsel reveals the beginnings of his ideology and subsequent judicial philosophy," the LCCR report observes. "In that application, he strongly embraces the conservative ideology of the Reagan administration, singling out his work to restrict affirmative action and limit the remedies available to victims

of discrimination as areas that he was 'particularly proud.'"

The LDF report quotes Alito's comments in more detail: "Most recently, it has been an honor and source of personal satisfaction for me to serve in the office of the Solicitor General during President Reagan's administration and to help advance legal positions in which I personally believe very strongly. I am particularly proud of my contributions in recent cases in which the government has argued in the Supreme Court that racial and ethnic quotas should not be allowed."

His opponents were not seeking quotas, which had been forbidden by the executive order creating affirmative action.

LDF discovered that, "As a lawyer in the Solicitor General's office, Alito participated in three major affirmative action cases before the Supreme Court...he argued against court-ordered affirmative action as a remedy for violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964...against voluntary affirmative action under Title VII...and against voluntary affirmative action under the Constitution."

In his 1985 application, LCCR noted, Alito wrote: "In college, I developed a deep interest in constitutional law, motivated in large part by disagreement with Warren Court decisions, particularly

in the areas of criminal procedure, the Establishment Clause and reapportionment."

LCCR observes, "At the time of his statement, nearly everyone accepted the legitimacy of the Warren Court's 20-year old rulings on reapportionment — Baker v. Carr, which said for the first time, that the federal courts had a role to play in making sure that all Americans have a right to equal representation; Wesberry v. Sanders, in which the Court ruled that Congressional districts have to be roughly equal in population; and Reynolds v. Sims, in which the Court held that state legislative districts had to be equal in population, according to the principle of 'one person, one vote.'"

On the bench, Alito dissented from the majority's decision that a Black employee had supplied enough information for her racial discrimination case to be heard by a jury. In Bray v. Marriott Hotels, Alito favored a very narrow reading of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the section barring employment discrimination. The majority said that if Alito's interpretation of the law had been accepted, "Title VII would be eviscerated" and that his view would "immunize employers from the reach of Title VII" in certain circumstances.

The majority also took Alito to task for his dissent in Riley

v. Taylor, a case about whether the prosecutor had used racially-motivated peremptory strikes to exclude African-Americans from a jury. LDF said Alito equated that action to the statistical oddity of five of the last six U.S. presidents being left-handed. The judges in the majority rebuked Alito, accusing him of minimizing "the history of discrimination against potential black jurors and black defendants."

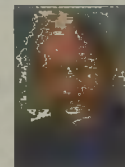
The Alliance for Justice Report noted, "University of Chicago law professor Cas Sunstein examined Judge Alito's approximately 65 dissents on the theory that 'when a judge bothers to dissent from a majority is a good clue to what the judge cares most about.' What Sunstein found was 'stunning. Ninety-one percent of Alito's dissents take positions more conservative than his colleagues on the appeals court, including colleagues appointed by Presidents Bush and Reagan..."

Clearly, Alito is to the right of right-wingers.

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President protected by raw, naked power

The more perspective we get on the Impeachment of



Ron Walters
Bill Clinton, the more we understand that it was an exercise in raw, naked political power by the Republicans who had the opportunity

to do it, at a time when they were in power. The acts of George Bush in prosecuting the Iraq war pale in comparison to the so-called "high crimes and misdemeanors" associated with Clinton's lying to a grand jury about consensual sex.

Republicans, still in power, will now use their raw, naked political power to allow the fundamental change in the Supreme Court's decisions on civil rights, no doubt affect the rights of women to control their own bodies through obtaining abortions, and swing the balance more in the direction of corporate power.

But most important, they are using their raw, naked power to shield the president from the kind of justice meted out to Bill Clinton by the historical embarrassment of impeachment. We have a president in power at this moment, who intended to pursue a war in Iraq that was conceived at the moment he sat down in the White House, not on September 11, 2001;

he went to war without the sanction of the United Nations Security Council and therefore, could be construed to have committed a crime under international law; he distorted intelligence related to Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and therefore, lied to the American people about the threat Iraq posed to American security as a pretext for war; he changed the law of war to permit torture, and now we find that he has been spying on the American people in violation of the charter of the National Security Agency and the Constitution of the United States. What more do you want? What more constitutes a "high crime?"

Consider this. Bush has committed a crime under international law by violating the Nuremberg Principles, a treaty signed by the United States in 1950 and which ostensibly is the law of the land. For example:

Principle III says that "the fact that a person who committed an act which constitutes a crime under international law acted as a head of state or responsible government official does not relieve him from responsibility under international law..."

Principle VI defines the nature of the crimes. The first is "Crimes Against Peace," defined as "planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression or a war

in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances..." Second, "participation in a conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the acts mentioned..."

Then there are "War Crimes" which entail "violation of the laws or customs of war" including such things as, "murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war..."

The Bush administration has, by these principles, committed crimes much more important than telling a lie to a grand jury about sex. But where are those who would uphold the treaties signed by the United States? More important, where are those who uphold the lessons learned by the international community in correcting for all times, the carnage waged by the Hitler regime against other nations and human beings. In other words, who will prosecute the crimes?

By the use of raw power, the lack of action by the Republican leadership reduces the Nuremberg principles, won by the blood spilled by millions of people, to a hollow, momentary statement in history, not a set of humanitarian principles that should guide the conduct of nations toward each other for some time to come.

The adoption of a policy of preemptive war against any nation is tricky, because it rests ultimately on the quality of the intelligence at the disposal of the war-makers. But

there is evidence in the British intelligence documents that this war was intentional, therefore, even more of a crime against humanity, a high crime which is more than a misdemeanor, a felony in the eyes of the international community.

Americans are shielded from this crime by the raw, naked power of politicians who hold the control of the reigns of government at this moment. This shield has allowed the administration and those who support it to pursue a naked fiction — that the Iraq war was a response to the terrorism that was the basic tactic of 9-11. And so, the administration has been allowed to get away with calling the war in Iraq, a "war against terror" that includes what happened here.

The real crime now is the cover-up, the protection of the moral bankruptcy that corrupts the politics and the image of the United States before the world. At some point, the American people will have to decide how to cleanse this stain from the Constitution and from the conduct of the presidency. But for now, it is the use of raw, naked power that protects this corruption, making that power itself corrupt.

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