

## Should black folks leave America?

Ever since we arrived in this country there have been conversations about our leaving. Movements, threats, cajoling, incentives, and every manner of effort by blacks and whites alike, from Paul Cuffee to Marcus Garvey, and from James Monroe to Abe Lincoln, have been discussed and, in some cases, implemented to get black people out of this country.

While there have been several prominent black people who have left, there has been no mass exodus by black people since Liberia, the 1967 move to Africa by the African Hebrew Israelites notwithstanding.

In light of all that has happened to black people in this country, in addition to what is occurring now in the new millennium, should black people seriously consider leaving America? We have been here since the beginning, contributed more than anyone else to the foundational wealth of this country, sacrificed more than anyone else for this country, and yet we are still treated like the "three-fifths" they called us when they wrote their Constitution. Should we now walk away?

There comes a time in the lives of most people when they can no longer take seeing their people being left out, marginalized, mistreated, abused, and murdered. They simply throw their hands up, pack up, and leave. Although many have followed the examples of black musicians and artists, and other brothers and sisters who simply yearned to "breathe free," as the inscription on the Statue of Liberty says, let's look at two black men. Those men are W.E.B. DuBois and Randall Robinson.

"After ninety-five years of the most courageous unflinching devotion to black freedom witnessed in the 20th Century, W.E.B. DuBois not only left America for Africa but concluded: 'I cannot take anymore of this country's treatment. We leave for Ghana October 5th and I set no date for return Chin up, and fight on, but realize that American Negroes can't win.'" (An excerpt from "The Future of the Race," by Louis Gates and Cornell West.)

In Amitabh Pal's recent interview of Randall Robinson, an eerie similarity to DuBois' words and thoughts came forth from Robinson as he explained his reasons for "Quitting America," also the title of his latest book. "I was really worn down by an American society that is racist, smugly blind to it, and hugely self-satisfied. I wanted to live in a place where that wasn't always a distorting weight. Black people in America have to, for their own protection, develop a defense mechanism, and I just grew terribly tired of it. When you sustain that kind of affront, and sustain it and sustain it and sustain it, something happens to you. You try to steer a course in American society that's not self-destructive. But America is a country that inflicts injury. It does not like to see anything that comes in response, and accuses one of anger as if it were an unnatural response. For anyone who is not white in America, the affronts are virtually across the board."

Looks like these two brothers just got fed up with the nonsense and the "struggle," as we love to call it. Looks like they just made up their minds to pursue something better than the American status quo. Looks like they decided that life was too precious to spend any more time waiting for white folks to change this corrupt, disparate, one-sided system in which we live. Looks like these brothers finally got the message. Have we gotten the message?

Before you attribute this article as a call for Black people to move out of the U.S., let me make it clear that I am not advocating such an action, but I certainly understand why it occurs. One day I may leave this country for good, but I am not saying all black people should do so, nor am I saying we should stay here. I just want to use history, both old and recent, to stimulate thinking around what is happening to black people in this country.

It's not so much that DuBois left for Ghana, it's what he said when he departed. It's not so important that Robinson quit this country, it's what caused him to quit. The rest of us who remain in this country must, first, see what is happening to our people, and then make up our minds, both individually and collectively, to do something about it. Those who choose to do nothing must keep in mind that acquiescing to mistreatment is really doing something.

The latest cuts in initiatives that assist poor people, the elderly, veterans, and college students, juxtaposed against continued tax cuts for millionaires, should serve as a very clear indication of how the majority of black people are viewed. While we play the political game, and that's exactly what it is, others run off with the economic spoils. By the way, don't be surprised if there is another catastrophe in this country soon. If you know the history of America you know that's the best way to get "the people" back on the president's bandwagon.

If you choose to leave, no one can blame you. If you choose to stay, you had better prepare yourself for battle.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, a professor at the University of Cincinnati, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald newspaper.



JAMES CLINGMAN

## We're partners in building viable public education

### Charlotte-Mecklenburg must take initiative to move ahead

As I look back on 10 years as a Board of Education member, I encourage us to celebrate the commitment of CMS staff and our community—a commitment that has brought tremendous improvements in student achievement, with national recognition.



LOUISE WOODS

Looking toward the next 10 years, will we become like so many urban centers—losing our focus, blaming each other for failures, dividing and deserting our public schools? Or will we unite with a renewed focus to take our public schools to a new level? Our accomplishments are clear. In 10 years, more than twice as many subsidized-lunch and minority fifth graders have reached grade level on the state ABC's, with African Americans jumping from 35 percent to 84 percent on grade level in reading. Recently, on the National Assessment of Education Progress, CMS students excelled, and African-Americans here outscored African-American students in NC, nationwide and in all but one other state. These gains, made despite increasing numbers of high-needs students and English language learners, did not come easily. They were made despite more economically and racially isolated schools.

They required our diverse school board—the first elected both by districts and at-large—to put aside personal differences and unite around goals of literacy and equity. With this focus, we hired a new superintendent committed to those goals.

Superintendent, staff and board focused on high standards and a common curriculum with high expectations for students in all schools. We addressed student needs with better funding and lower pupil-teacher ratios. We began to bring experienced, successful staff to high-needs schools, created more positive learning environments, and upgraded facilities to support student learning.

Where these initiatives were fully implemented, students showed success. But the job is far from finished. Our achievement gap is far too high. High poverty middle and high schools struggle. Our high schools need change now. Without continued progress and support to raise us to a new level—CMS will not be able to educate all students well.

We are still millions short of funds to staff high-needs schools at the levels that produce success. Five thousand more students a year, increased student needs, higher accountability goals—all require additional funding.

There are also troubling signs that the goal of educating every child is slipping down the priority list of the state and the community. The state has required millions in cuts, and despite Leandro, has allotted no additional funds for the more than 50,000 students of poverty in CMS. Despite inadequate facilities, school bonds failed. Growth needs absorbed funds from property tax increase. Yet, elected officials refused to support Commissioners' request for alternative funding sources. Locally, the challenges of suburban growth dominate public discussion.

Is this Charlotte-Mecklenburg's "perfect storm"? Is this when, despite solid evidence of increased student success, more active parents reject public schools? Will we continue the blame-game, divide, and decline? Or will we courageously step forward, as citizens did 35 years ago, and work to reunite our community? Will we support our public schools with our time, our resources and our children? Will we re-commit, create new solutions, and keep our promises to our children?

Our success or failure as a community may rest on our answer to this question.

Strong leadership is critical. Board members must treat each other respectfully and commit to working with the Superintendent to unite the community around success for ALL students. Successful teachers, equitable resources, a common curriculum and high expectations at all schools remain essential. Engaged School Leadership Teams are key.

Additional funding is necessary. However, CMS cannot succeed without a level of community commitment which goes beyond funding. It must involve elected officials at every level working together around policies that support children and families and reduce racial and economic isolation. Government agencies and nonprofits must join together around early childhood, after-school, parental involvement and quality teacher initiatives. Finally, a broad range of businesses, individuals, parents, students, neighborhood organizations, community and faith groups must turn their energies to the schools which need them most.

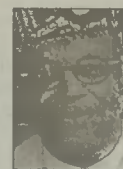
Successful principals name advocates, mentors, and volunteers as unsung heroes who make the difference in many schools. But there are too few for the task at hand.

As we end this season of holy days, let's pray that God will lead us, individually and collectively, to find ways we can help His children, our children. God has given this community the resources we need to provide a quality education for every child. Will we choose to use them?

LOUISE WOODS is a member of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board.

## The real King remembered

"Life is a profound mystery," said my older brother, Rev. Isadore Mims, a retired Baptist pastor in Richmond, Virginia, during one of our routine theological discussions about 40 years ago.



GYASI FOLUKE

And one of these great mysteries, in part, is how the general public, retrospectively, can create heroes, real or mythological-like Dr. Martin L. King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, the gospel Jesus, Socrates and Asaru (Osiris)—highly praise and honor them, but only after they are physically dead. For these same people, during their earthly lifetime, often were demonized, vilified, persecuted and even crucified-killed by apparently stronger opposition forces in society. Indeed, if these same heroic characters would return physically to earth today, I predict that, again, they would be killed, if not DOA—dead on arrival; for, paradoxically, "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

Fortunately however, a few of us in the Charlotte area, including Dr. Reginald Hawkins and this author, can remember the real Dr. King, for we worked with him, however briefly, and/or shared the same basic communal-humanitarian ideals for which he fought and died. Moreover, these ideals included reparations, a "Marshall Plan" for blacks, although today we hear only the relatively empty rhetoric, "I Have a Dream," devoid of any substantive programmatic proposals, truly, to implement this dream, reflecting blatant hypocrisy, par excellence.

Equally germane, some of us can recall how the overwhelming majority of whites in America, perhaps over 90 percent if measured statistically, utterly detested Dr. King, while strongly opposing those of us who worked against tremendous odds, metaphorically swimming upstream, in this protracted, ongoing struggle for black liberation in America or "Seven Dimensions of Freedom"—physical, mental, economic, political, cultural, emotional and spiritual. Moreover, in the context of such strong white opposition to us—while hypocritically proclaiming "liberty and justice for all"—I can never forget a major philosophical-emotional turning point in my life, perhaps an epiphany, in April 1968 when Dr. King was brutally murdered by domestic terrorists, with the probable secret involvement of the FBI and/or the CIA.

Indeed, when King was murdered, I was in Vietnam as an Air Force officer, sent there involuntarily because of my expressed opposition to that immoral-inane and militarily "unwinnable" war. And when the death of Dr. King officially was announced, virtually all-white military personnel in my unit openly applauded this terrorist event. Therefore, I knew then, very consciously, what perhaps I had always known, subconsciously, that black "Americans" as a group, psycho-spiritually, was a population without a country, i.e., we did not "belong" (Maslow, 1954) to this essentially white nation, as symbolized by the American flag—a tragic reality, past and present, the latter reflected, most recently, through the Katrina disaster in New Orleans.

Additionally, some of us also can remember that during this era, some black or "kneegro" pastors would not permit Dr. King to visit or to speak in their churches. For totally apart from their fear of "massa" and his "low-life" terrorist lackeys, they were not attuned, theologically or philosophically, to our black struggle, forever preaching-teaching an irrelevant, obsolete, otherworldly "Christianity" that was "the opiate of the masses," in the profound words of Karl Marx; that is, they were "too heaven bound to have any good earthly sense."

And this ugly reality remains operative, even in the year 2006. Indeed, in painful corroboration of this reality, a most brilliant Black sister, Dr. Julia Hare, on a nationally televised program, recently, has stated (paraphrasing): "We have about a million black men in prisons waiting on justice and millions more black people in church waiting on Jesus." Tragic, a despicable-abominable posture that reflects adversely on many of our churches—one that I am addressing in a forthcoming book.

Accordingly, as we observe all of the "celebrations" of the birthday of Dr. King during this special season, let us be reminded that some, if not most, "celebrants" who belatedly or in retrospect, claim to admire or to love Dr. King, are acting through palpable hypocrisy. For the litmus test of their love or admiration for him is their embrace, pragmatically, of his noble ideals, including reparations, obviously and tragically, a political non-starter in about 90 percent of white America, as it was during the King era. Again, "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

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