

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

1531 Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203

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OPINION

CIAA and Charlotte good for each other

Tournament will grow here, and so will our reputation

Last week after much anticipation and preparation, the CIAA rolled into the Queen city. It was by all accounts a huge success. Just to be able to get a first hand account of the activities, I decided to camp out downtown.

There were thousands of black folk mulling around, and it was very exciting. A very friendly gathering of well-intentioned people ready to have a good time, spend money, and not be hassled.

I was very proud of my city Police officers were everywhere. Their presence reassured the security of the participants. But what was even more impressive was how they greeted and treated everyone. As the week was coming to an end and they were beginning to show fatigue, they did not waver from being very polite and cordial. Hats off to the men and women in blue for a job well done.

Then the city awarded the CIAA \$1 million dollars in scholarship funds. Now that is real class. It took us sixty years to get this thing and it looks like we want it to take that long to get rid of it. Hats off to the CIAA planning commission and to the CIAA.

Charlotte Bobcats Arena was a great venue to house the tournament. I have followed this tournament to Norfolk, Hampton, and Richmond in Virginia to Greensboro, Winston Salem, and Raleigh in North Carolina. None of the previous arenas come close to providing the amenities Bobcats Arena offers. Great luxury suites, state of the art scoreboard, state of the art media facilities, great visibility from anywhere in the arena, and much more. Moreover, the high tech arena facilitated the games playing well on television.

One of the biggest pluses Charlotte has over the previous cities hosting the event is the ability to accommodate a large amount of people within a close proximity of the main event venues. This was also one of the biggest fears. What's gonna happen when we concentrate this many black folk within blocks of each other? Well, what happened as many of us CIAA veterans predicted. Nothing. Yes, there were occasional traffic issues. Yes, parking was a pain as it always is. But no major incidences occurred. Tournament crowds were huge well into the early morning hours. But not even a fist-fight broke out that I am aware of.

As great as the event was there were some things that needed fine-tuning. There are entirely too many activities. If you consider the games (yes, the real reason for the tournament) starts at 1pm and ends after 11pm everyday except Saturday, then there isn't much time for anything else. Several excellent activities take place after 11pm, but after playing host to friends and clients all day at the games, who has the energy to do anything else? My suggestion would be to move the Saturday finals to afternoon games starting at 1 p.m. This would free Saturday evening for other activities before my bedtime.

Finally, a note to restaurateurs adjust your hours to accommodate the CIAA participants. The games go from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. each night. Other activities are going on prior to the game and after the game. The biggest opportunity to make money during this event is from midnight to 5 a.m. The menu should be breakfast food. I do not know about everybody, but black folk who are up this late and drinking alcoholic beverages will want to eat, but not heavy food. Breakfast menus with plenty of coffee works well. If you don't believe me, just ask the good folk at Mert's and the Coffee Cup.

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



Thousands of visitors flocked to Charlotte last week for the CIAA basketball tournament at Bobcats Arena and related activities.



New Orleans' impoverished recovery

Six months after Hurricane Katrina, some public officials in New Orleans are waving a "Keep Out" sign in front of some of its poorest residents.

In many instances, the culprits are black. If some of the statements made by New Orleans City Council President Oliver Thomas, an African-American, had been uttered by a White person, he or she would have been lambasted as a racist.

"We don't need soap opera watchers right now," Oliver said. "We're going to target the people who are going to work. It's not that I'm fed up, but that at some point there has to be a whole new level of motivation, and people have got to stop blaming the government for something they ought to do."

He added, "There has been a lot of pampering, and at some point, you have to say, 'No, no, no.'"

Instead of saying no to Oliver's callousness, the council president was applauded by fellow council members Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson and Renee Gill Pratt.

Thomas' rant was a slap in the face of not only the residents, but to other communities that unselfishly

embraced evacuees from New Orleans.

An editorial in the Houston Chronicle, published under the headline, "No Welcome Home," observed: "Thomas and other New Orleans leaders may characterize their stance as tough love, but to Houstonians who indiscriminately opened their homes, churches and pocketbooks to Katrina evacuees, the comments sound heartless. When people were in need, Houston and Harris County relief agencies did not screen applicants for their wage-earning potential before delivering medical care, shelter, and counseling to the victims."

The editorial concluded, "It seems that some of the designers of the future New Orleans want to discourage poor and disadvantaged residents from returning."

The Housing Authority of New Orleans, already in federal receivership, is actively extending what it calls "working preference" to public housing residents hoping to return.

"Part of the overall process is asking about people's willingness to work," Nadine Jarmon, the federal receiver, told the New Orleans Times-Picayune. "If someone says, 'Well, my income qualifies me for public housing and I want to come home,' but they don't express a willingness to work, or they don't have a training background, or they weren't working before Katrina, then

you're making a decision to pass over those people."

But is that right?

As Houston City Councilman M. J. Khan told the Houston Chronicle, "A city is a combination of all kinds of people. We cannot pick and choose who will live in a city."

But that's exactly what New Orleans is trying to do.

While city officials ponder ways to exclude many of the poor, there is a different kind of discrimination going on in the housing market.

A report titled, "Recovering States? The Gulf Coast Six Months After the Storms," by Oxfam America notes:

"Hurricane Katrina and Rita left in their path a massive housing crisis. More than 300,000 houses were destroyed, which is over 10 times the number destroyed in the next-most destructive US hurricane, Hurricane Andrew. At least 1,850,000 housing units were damaged. In heavily impacted areas of Louisiana, approximately 112,340 households were without insurance. Of the 50,000 owners in Mississippi who received flood damage to their homes, some 35,000 had no flood insurance."

The report by Oxfam, international human rights organization, states that Mississippi and Louisiana have been awarded more than \$11 billion in emergency Community Development Block Grant funds and

President Bush has requested an additional \$4.2 billion to rebuild housing in the region.

"The parameters for assistance, however, end up excluding people with the fewest resources to recover on their own: renters and low-income homeowners."

Approximately 45 percent of the 300,000 destroyed homes were occupied by renters, the report said. In some black pockets, such as the Gulfport and Moss Point/Pascagoula sections of Mississippi, more than 60 percent of the residents were renters.

And they are expected to have an even harder time rebuilding.

Rather than further penalize renters, the report urged: "Increase homeownership opportunities for renters, thereby allowing them to build equity, by using federal rebuilding funds to provide homebuyer counseling, access to non-predatory mortgage financing, and connections to nonprofit housing developers with a stated mission and track record of building affordable single-family housing."

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Hooray for Baltimore's progressiveness

Yes, I have become a Baltimore cheerleader. No, not a cheerleader for its sports teams, but a cheerleader for Baltimore's dedicated, enlightened, and strong black men and women determined to be positive change agents for economic empowerment.

Several of the brothers and sisters to whom I am referring were in attendance at the annual black history event produced by Louis Fields.

African American Tourist Council of Maryland.

I was honored to be selected to speak at the banquet which, by the way, was held

at a black owned facility

called The Forum, owned and

operated by none other than

black business icon,

Raymond Haysbert Sr., former owner of Parks Sausage

and fellow Cincinnati native.

Talk about proud: that's

exactly what I felt to be on

the same dais with Brother

Haysbert and to have him critique my message of economic empowerment, as well as to be speaking to Black people about black business while

enjoying food prepared by

Black caterers all taking

place inside a beautiful

Black-owned banquet hall.

The event not only recognized black history, it also honored and celebrated another brother who died "on his way to freedom," Robert L. Clay, Baltimore businessman, an uncompromising, frontline fighter for black contractors in Baltimore and the entire state of Maryland.

The program book stated, "Robert Clay's example shows that a black man can be successful without selling out." That's my kind of brother, whose personality and smile reminded me so much of Ken Bridges.

In addition, the black history event made history by celebrating the formation of the Baltimore Black Chamber of Commerce, a much-needed entity in a city comprising a 65 percent black population.

Like I said, Hooray for Baltimore! Brothers and sisters there are making the right moves. It's only a start, but it's the start that's necessary to achieve their goal of black businesses moving forward together in 2006 and beyond.

I have stressed for years the importance of viable,

unapologetic, and unwavering

black chambers of commerce – not minority chambers posing as black chambers.

From the looks of things in Baltimore, and with the help of those in attendance and other Baltimore black

folks, both business owners and individuals, the Chamber can be all it should and must be, and it can lead the way to economic empowerment.

My emphasis has also been on tourism and the myriad of opportunities offered in that industry, and how critically important it is for black people to take advantage of the millions of dollars we spend on tourism each year. In that regard, Brother Louis Fields is ahead of the curve, but he needs partnerships and support from black Baltimore in order to leverage more opportunities for his company and to open the door for more people to access tourism, convention, and conference business.

Why should we continue to spend our money and get very little in return? I know the progress will not be pervasive, but wherever we find victories for ourselves we must seize them; we are so far behind.

One interesting thing I pointed out in my speech was the fact that Baltimore city's population is more than 60 percent black, thus black people are the majority, not minority. Then I posed a rhetorical question: Why then are you allowing yourselves to be played by "Minority Business Enterprise" programs and 15 percent – 25 percent minority set-aside programs?

It seems to me the 15 percent-25 percent should be set aside for white people and the other ethnic groups that reside in Baltimore since they are the "minority" group. Hey, that's only fair, and it's the right thing to do. After all, black people are some of the fairest, most considerate people on earth, especially when it comes to accommodating everyone else.

With what Baltimore has going for it, a glowing and rich history which, by the way, was recounted by Brother Louis Diggs, prolific author and chronicler of black history in Baltimore, the city's excellent reputation as a tourist destination, great food, majority black population, and all the consciousness that resides there, Baltimore's potential is virtually unlimited.

Thanks Baltimore. I plan to be back on May 6, with Earl Trent, author of "Challenge to the Black Church," and Pastor Jonathan Weaver, founder of the Collective Banking Group, and other panelists. In the meantime, "No Tricks in 2006" and, as Nathan Hare says, "Let's Boycott Prisons!"

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, a professor at the University of Cincinnati, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce.

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