

# The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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OPINION

## Helping brothers get selves together

If you believe what the New York Times said last Monday then you know that the state of black men in America is in a world of hurt. If you believe what black people have been saying for decades, then you already knew that.



ANGELA LINDSAY

The publication ran an article titled "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn" which showcased the results of studies performed by experts from Princeton, Harvard, and Columbia Universities and other institutions. What did the article tell us? Here are some of the highlights:

- In 2000, 65 percent of black male high school dropouts in their 20s were jobless. By 2004, the share had grown to 72 percent, compared with 34 percent of white and 19 percent of Hispanic dropouts. When high school graduates were included, half of black men in their 20s were jobless in 2004, up from 46 percent in 2000.

- In 1995, 16 percent of black men in their 20s who did not attend college were in jail or prison; by 2004, 21 percent were incarcerated. By their mid-30s, 6 in 10 black men who had dropped out of school had spent time in prison.

- In the inner cities, more than half of all black men do not finish high school.

These statistics are really nothing new. In fact, they are, in one way or another, issues that black commentators, community leaders and intellectuals have been discussing for decades. Still, so compelling was this story, apparently that it garnered coverage in another local newspaper last week, as well as discussions on several local and national radio programs, and was the most emailed story of the day last Monday.

So why the national focus now? Did the publication of the article in such a reputable, nationally recognized newspaper somehow make the dire situation with black men more real-a little more tangible? Should we be expected to take the crisis seriously now that more of our dirty laundry has been splashed all over the media? Was the purpose to shame black men into positive action or prompt the rest of America to do more than shake their heads and move on with daily life?

The article really didn't say why the researchers decided to conduct the study now. But here's what we do know: black men need to get it together.

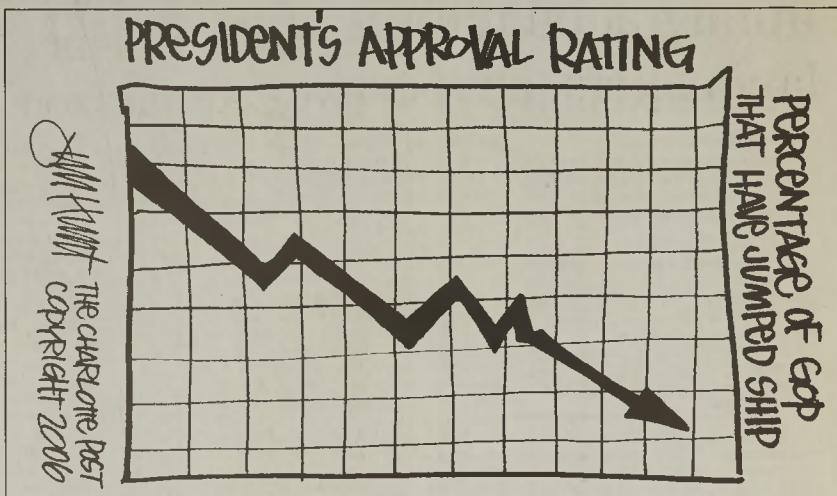
Having said that, we know the unique and often difficult challenges that black men in America face every day, and there various factors that contribute to those black men who fall within the above statistics. The article cited problems such as poor schooling, the breakdown of the family unit, and modern-day discrimination as reasons. We also live in a culture that glorifies gangster life and elevates rappers and athletes, in the absence of fathers, to role model status. Some commentators reach farther back and point to the lingering effects of slavery, Willie Lynch, Jim Crow, and the civil rights era as additional sources of the black man's disconnect from the mainstream.

These are all legitimate reasons for the numbers above, but as I heard one commentator say, at some point the "Oppressed need to stand up and stop being depressed." The sense of hopelessness and feeling of a lack of alternatives that particularly pervade inner city neighborhoods can be overcome. It has happened before. As much as a sobering slap in the face that the article may have been for some, we know there are no simple solutions, and the remedy certainly is not in the New York Times, or any other paper for that matter. A lot of success comes from the will of the individual to make better decisions and, if need be, take responsibility for their actions. That has been proven. And a lot of that kind of guidance comes from the home and community.

By most accounts, it's harder to teach how to be a responsible adult when you didn't have that example growing up. So begins the cycle such as that of one young man interviewed for the article who, at 28 years old, had dropped out of school in the 10th grade to sell drugs and already has four children by three mothers. He claims he now wants to "get himself together" which is, albeit a long time coming, a positive change. Still, unfortunately, his story is repeated too often throughout black communities nationwide.

There are various education, training and life skills programs in place to help ex-offenders and high school drop-outs, but to reverse trends such as there being more black men in jail than working on any given day, we must start earlier. Last Sunday, my pastor talked about the joys of working as a big brother to an eight year-old through the Big Brother/Big Sister program. I know several others who participate in this program and rave about its positive impact, for both the mentor and child. I realize that this program alone or any other singular program will not provide a comprehensive solution to this growing problem. But we have to start somewhere... before more black men end up nowhere.

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## American media's war of words

As the U.S. begins Year 4 of its occupation of Iraq, the media cannot look at its behavior over the past three years and declare victory. In fact, when it comes to telling the truth, many journalists and commentators have surrendered without putting up a fight.



GEORGE E. CURRY

A compilation of the media's greatest hits - or, biggest flops - has been assembled by the watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting and can be found online at [www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org). From the outset of the war, the public's watchdogs have been serving as the Bush administration's lapdogs.

Fox News Channel Brit Hume is one of Bush's leading cheerleaders.

"The majority of the American media who were in a position to comment upon the progress of the war in the early going, and even after that, we got it wrong," Hume said in a speech in Richmond, Va. "They didn't get it just a little wrong. They got it completely wrong." [Richmond Times Dispatch April 25, 2004]

Fellow conservative Charles Krauthammer, a columnist for the Washington Post, sounds a similar alarm.

"The only people who think this wasn't a victory are Upper Westside liberals, and a few people here in Washington." [Inside Washington April 19, 2003]

One of the newspapers read by Upper Westside liberals in New York was not to be outdone by its Washington competitor: Times reporter David Carr said: "Liberal writers for ideologically driven magazines like The Nation and less overtly political ones like The New Yorker did not predict a defeat, but the terrible consequences many warned of have not happened. Now liberal commentators must address the victory at hand and confront an ascendant conservative juggernaut that asserts United States might can set the world right." [April 16 2003]

Fox's News Bill O'Reilly boasted, "It won't take weeks. You know that, professor. Our military machine will crush Iraq in a matter of days and there's no question that it will." [Feb. 10, 2003]

Another Fox commentator, Morton Kondracke, did not attempt to restrain his glee.

"Well, the hot story of the week is victory," he said.

"...The Tommy Franks-Don Rumsfeld battle plan, war plan, worked brilliantly, a three-week war with mercifully few American deaths or Iraqi civilian deaths... There is a lot of work yet to do, but all the naysayers have been humiliated so far... The final word on this is hooray!" [April 12, 2003]

A Los Angeles Times headline that proclaimed, "Iraq is All but Won; Now What?" [April 10, 2003]

CBS News reporter Joie Chen declared, "Now that the combat phase of the war in Iraq is officially over, what begins is a debate throughout the entire U.S. government over America's unrivaled power and how best to use it." [May 4, 2003]

Along with cheering U.S. troops entering Iraq - maybe Rumsfeld confused U.S. journalists/commentators with Iraqi citizens he had predicted would be waving U.S. flags as they were being "liberated" - they sounded like Bush minions on the issue of weapons of mass destruction.

"Over the next couple of weeks when we find chemical weapons this guy was amazing, the fact that this war was attacked by the left and so the right was so vindicated. I think, really means that the left is going to have to hang

its head for three or four more years," said Dick Morris on Fox News. [April 9, 2003]

"Saddam could decide to take Baghdad with him," Newsweek said March 17, 2003. "One Arab intelligence officer interviewed by Newsweek spoke of the green mushroom" over Baghdad...

MSNBC reporter Bob Arnot: "...More than anything else, real vindication for the administration. One, credible evidence of weapons of mass destruction. Two, you know what? There were a lot of terrorists here, really bad guys. I saw them." [April 9, 2003]

Syndicated columnist Cal Thomas set himself up for a future ridicule.

"Speaking to the U.N. Security Council last week, Secretary of State Colin Powell made so strong a case that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein is in material breach of U.N. resolutions that only the duped, the dumb and the desperate could ignore it." [Feb. 2, 2003]

Okay, Cal, which one are you?

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## Put first things first for collective future

Before we are able to make the meaningful progress necessary to bring about a change in the economic status of our community, we must educate ourselves in the areas of collectivism, mutual economic responsibility, and the advantages of supporting one another in our endeavors.

Yes, we must continue to participate in the political arena, but with the understanding of what really controls politics.

Bankers, corporate cronies, and lobbyists rule the day in Washington. By the way, who is the lobbyist for black folks? We are in a war for our economic survival, and most of the time we seem to be in a blue funk when it comes to doing what we know is necessary to provide for our collective future.



JAMES CLINGMAN

Among the Bush people, liars abound. We have the likes of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney, two guys who couldn't care less about being elected or having a government job, they stand before the cameras, smugly and arrogantly, and spew their lies with impunity - not to mention Scott McClellan, the president's Press Secretary. In many cases, we are buying their lies, while our children are going out of the world backwards, as the saying goes. Politics, yes; but first, economic empower-

ment, absolutely.

Economics does not have to be shrouded in confusing terms nor be as complicated as many would have us believe. For our purposes, economics must be lowered from the lofty heights of academia to the "street talk" with which we are all familiar. It, too, must become a part of our vernacular, because at that level we can deal with our concerns, our complaints, and our problems with the only ammunition that is effective: Our Dollars.

During the sit-ins of 1960 in Greensboro and other cities, while we were seeking equality and the right to integrate socially, we began to lose sight of the economic advantages we already had. The most important were our black-owned businesses, but they soon faded away. As we explored our new found "right" to buy the same products and services we had always bought, only now we could purchase them from white folks, we forgot about ourselves. Another boycott was about to begin - that of our own businesses.

Let us never discredit the sacrifices made to secure our public accommodation rights; those were some of the most important and significant times in black history. We should be grateful to those who made it possible for us to have the things we have today. But now, here in the 21st century, with its "global economy" with all of our political and social progress, we are even more economically blind than we were just

two generations ago.

Why is this true? One reason is the political complacency that sets in after we elect black people. Black elected officials do not necessarily equate to black economic prosperity. Our African-American politicians can only do so much, and sometimes that's very little, to relieve the plight and blight of our communities. After we have helped them get into office, we cannot then sit back and wait to see what they are going to do "for" us. We must continue to help them so they will be able to do something "with" us.

Our politicians, at least the ones we help get elected, must be accountable to us, and that will only happen if we abide by the one rule that counts in politics: The money rule. Yes, they want our votes, but have you noticed, during the run-up to an election, how much discussion there is about who has the most money in his or her coffers? Unless African-Americans are willing to support our candidates with our dollars as well as our votes, we will have neither accountability nor influence in the political arena.

We, as a national community, have a good understanding of elections and political proceedings; but we are sorely lacking in our execution of basic economic strategies for our local communities. Politics is quite important, but first we must support one another, demand reciprocity from those with whom we do business, and work together

toward ownership of our communities. Our politics will fall in place when our economic initiatives succeed.

Collective work was a very positive precept of our African ancestors. Today, in some circles, that principle has been promulgated as one reason for the dearth of African-American entrepreneurs. Some say that because we are a communal people, we are reluctant to seek the individual path of entrepreneurship. This may be partially true, but it does not have to prevent us from using that same spirit of communality to support those of us who are entrepreneurs. Can you imagine how empowered we would be if we drew upon our basic natural inclination to be a real community? We would be well on our way to economic, educational, and political parity.

Right now, we don't count. Can you imagine that? We spend \$700 billion, and we don't count. Why? There's no need for the majority to deal with us in any serious manner, especially economically, because we don't act collectively. That's not to say that we should all think alike and act alike and never disagree. It simply means that we should consider our group first, and not be so willing to push one another aside for our individual advancement.

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