

# The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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## OPINIONS

## Lessons the children are teaching adults

On November 14, the Children's Defense Fund held a Beat the Odds Awards Dinner in Washington, D.C. With special guest Renée Zellweger and co-chairs Al Wentworth and her husband George Stephanopoulos.

CDF launched the Beat the Odds program in 1990 to celebrate young people who do well despite poverty, violence, homelessness, family breakup, or substance abuse that make even the smallest achievements difficult. Students are honored at special awards ceremonies and receive a significant scholarship award and other prizes. Beat the Odds events are held in communities across the country, and the five high school students just honored in Washington are extraordinary young people with inspiring stories.

At age 13, Chloe was uprooted from her home in Florida and moved to her aunt's house in South Carolina with her younger sister after their mother received a Naval deployment to the D.C. area. Eventually, Chloe and her sister joined their mother, but as she continually struggled to make ends meet, these became just the first in a series of evictions and regular moves for the family. Soon they began keeping everything they owned in boxes because they never knew when the next move was coming. After the family became homeless, the county placed them in a hotel room an hour-long bus ride away from Chloe's school. But despite her challenging and constantly shifting circumstances, Chloe has maintained a positive outlook and a rare sense of confidence. She is a member of the National Honor Society, and chooses to consider poverty her motivation instead of her excuse.

Michael lives by a motto: "You can follow the destiny you were born into or you can carve your own path." Looking at his family environment, Michael's destiny didn't seem very bright. His mother suffers from schizophrenia, and his father conducted illegal activities to support his drug and alcohol use, including selling the family's food stamps. At one point he exploited Michael's computer talents by forcing him to choose between forging checks for him or going without food. But after his parents were caught cashing duplicated checks, Michael was sent to live with supportive legal guardians who have helped him use his once-exploited talents to start a technology club at his high school and become the webmaster for the Key Club. Michael dreams of becoming a politician so he can improve the lives of other people stuck in situations similar to the ones he's faced.

Natasha grew up in Jamaica without knowing her mother, who lived in the United States. Her father was often absent, too, leaving Natasha and her younger brother for days or months at a time to take care of themselves. And when he returned, he was sexually abusive. Natasha then lived at a facility for girls and with an unkind neighbor and her sexually-threatening husband before her mother finally brought her and her brother to the United States. But her mother was in an abusive relationship here that affected the entire family. Child Protective Services eventually intervened after an episode of family violence, and Natasha went to live with her grandmother.

Now, with a 3.8 GPA, she wants to use her education to empower young girls to escape conditions similar to the ones she endured. Natasha says without her painful memories, she wouldn't have learned the valuable lessons that have taught her how to become forgiving, strong, and loving and given her the courage to go after her dreams.

Tuan looks forward to being the first in his family to graduate from an American high school. They immigrated from Vietnam in 1994 in hopes of a better life, but despite his father's background as a Vietnamese Army officer, he has been sorely under-employed in the United States and currently works in a T-shirt factory. Tuan's mother suffers from chronic arthritis that prevents her from working. To make matters worse, Tuan's father was recently hospitalized and diagnosed with a liver disease that has threatened the family's only source of income. Because he speaks English fluently, Tuan serves as the interpreter for his family, which means he often has to miss school to go with his parents to the Social Security Administration or the hospital.

But instead of being overwhelmed by his circumstances, Tuan uses them as inspiration to achieve academically. He maintains a 3.7 GPA and describes his future education plans with great maturity and seriousness that is rare for a high school senior, because he equates his success with the health and future of his family.

When Charlette was five, she lost her father to AIDS. At age 12, a family friend raped her. Over the next few years, additional traumatic events destabilized her life even further: first, her family was evicted from their home. Then, one of her friends was shot at school. Next, students at her school were displaced when the building had to undergo a long mercury decontamination process. Finally, her family moved in with her grandmother, who suffers from Alzheimer's. But even while carrying the burden of her personal life, Charlette has refocused on her academics at a new charter school and become a leader in the classroom.

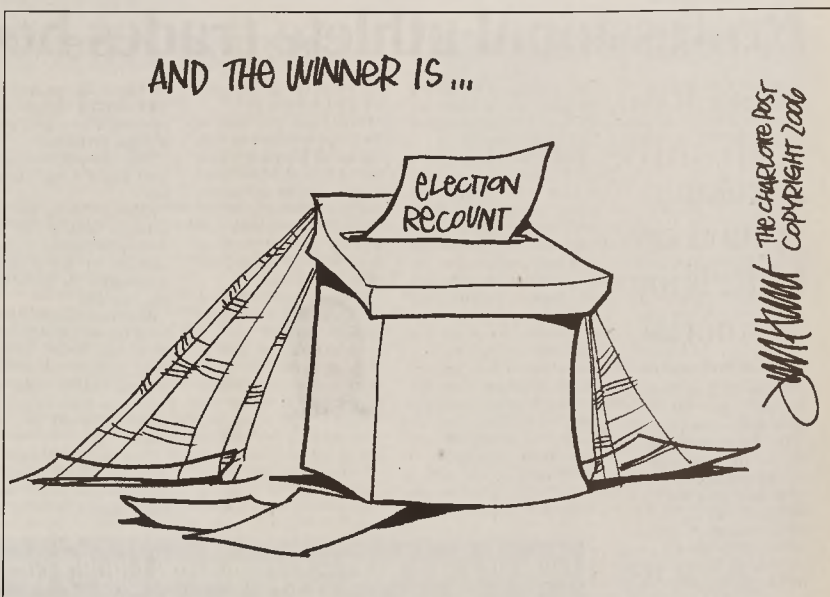
Throughout it all her mother has been her source of strength, and she taught Charlette that if you can't be strong for yourself, you can't be strong for anyone else. But this past summer Charlette learned her mother has lung cancer—so now Charlette wants to be strong for her.

I am so proud of these young people. They and the thousands of young people like them—many all around us and struggling quietly each day to stay on track and do the right thing—deeply deserve our recognition, praise, and support.

Benettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.



MARIAN  
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## Trent Lott has the record of a racist

After expressing support four years ago for Senator Strom Thurmond's pro-segregation 1948 presidential campaign, then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott went on Black Entertainment Television to repudiate himself, calling his comments insensitive, repugnant and inexcusable.

Lott was apologizing for having said at Thurmond's 100th birthday party, "I want to say this about my state. When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years."

When interviewed on BET by Ed Gordon, Lott, in an unsuccessful attempt to save his Senate leadership position, said he was wrong to have voted against establishing a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. federal holiday and said that he now favors affirmative action "across the board." He said, "As majority leader, I can help move an agenda that would hopefully be helpful to African Americans and minorities of all kinds and all Americans."

The groveling didn't stop there. "I'm trying to find a way to deal with the understandable hurt that I've caused," he told Gordon. "I

obviously made a mistake, and I'm going to do everything I can do to admit that and deal with it and correct it. And that's what I hope the people will give me a chance to do."

And what has Lott done to "correct it?" Nothing. On the NAACP Legislative Report Card for the 109th Congress (Jan. 4, 2005-Dec. 22, 2005), Lott received an "F" voting in favor of issues supported by the NAACP only 5 percent of the time.

Instead of contrasting Lott's words with his record, the media has been covering Lott's one-vote victory margin to become Senate Minority Whip as a story of redemption and vindication.

An Associated Press headline proclaimed, "Sweet Redemption: Republicans return Lott to Senate Leadership." The New York Times called it an "unlikely study in professional redemption." To its credit, the Los Angeles Times noted that Lott has "a credibility problem on issues of race."

In describing Lott's noxious comments, some outlets were especially timid. For example, the Associated Press gingerly described them this way: "At Senator Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday bash, Lott had saluted the South Carolina senator with comments later interpreted as support for Southern segregationist policies."

Although Lott denied being a racist on BET, his record

arguably supports such a conclusion. Both Fair.org and MediaMatters.com, media monitoring groups, have Trent's civil rights record posted on their sites, pointing out:

In 1981, Lott filed a "friend of the court" brief opposing the IRS's decision to terminate Bob Jones University's tax exempt status because it prohibited interracial dating.

In 1982, Lott voted against the extension of the Voting Rights Act.

In 1983, he voted against creating a national holiday to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

He voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1990, a measure that reversed five Supreme Court rulings that would have made it more difficult for people of color to win job discrimination lawsuits.

In 1992, he spoke to the Council of Conservative Citizens, a successor to the White Citizens' Council of the 1960s, saying "the people in this room stand for the right principles and the right philosophy. Let's take it in the right direction, and our children will be the beneficiaries."

In 1994, he voted to terminate federal funding for the King Holiday Commission.

In 1995, he criticized Rep. Bennie Thompson, Mississippi's lone African-American member of Congress, for seeking FBI documents on the death of civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer and

• In 2001, he was the only U.S. Senator to vote against President George W. Bush's nomination of Roger Gregory, an African-American, to the Fourth U.S. Court of Appeals.

In acknowledging to Ed Gordon that he had been wrong to vote against the federal holiday honoring Dr. King, Lott said: "I'm not sure we in America, certainly not white America and the people in the South, fully understood who this man was, the impact he was having on the fabric of this country."

Linda Chavez, a leading conservative, didn't buy that one.

"Sorry, Senator, that statement reflects willful ignorance. No one who lived through the civil rights era can fail to appreciate the social transformation that occurred through the efforts of Rev. King and other civil rights leaders."

"Sen. Lott's problem is not that he didn't understand what Rev. King was fighting for, but that, at that time, he was on the other side."

If Lott was sincere when he said he favors affirmative action "across the board," there could be no better time than now to prove it. If he's not sincere, we should see Trent Lott for what he is: a politician willing to say anything to regain power.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. Web site: [www.georgecurry.com](http://www.georgecurry.com).

## Turning Prince Georges into Compton?

There is certainly a correlation between race and economics when it comes to communities within the United States.

A moderate working-class white community will change into an upper middle class black community. It will be prestigious for a while and then it will be targeted by bad policy and over the years erosion starts to sit in and then crime invades its core. The crime gets so bad that property values start declining and the quality of life becomes pitiful. In a few decades you have what is known as a "golden ghetto." The final act is drug infestation. Why does this happen?

As my relatives emigrated from Louisiana to Los Angeles in the '40s and '50s, I saw communities make the above transition. There was "Lovely Compton." Two of my cousins integrated Fremont High. Another cousin helped integrate Washington High. My Aunt Mary and her clan

integrated Inglewood Aunt Lula and her clan bought a house at Hoover and Florence across the street from a synagogue. Decades later the Rodney King Riot would erupt three blocks down the street.

When I was discharged from the Army in 1974, Procter & Gamble assigned me to Detroit. Beautiful neighborhoods like Rosedale Park and Palmer Woods were heading south with a bullet—a whole lot of bullets. It hit bottom with the eruptions of the inevitable drug wars.

The most prestigious black county in the United States today is the D.C. suburb of Prince Georges County, Maryland. It has the highest black family income in the nation, which makes it a target for bad policy to be followed by crime and drug infestation.

Recently, I read a few studies that showed the General Services Administration (landlord for federal offices) had a systematic way of redlining Prince Georges County from any regional development. Its affect after decades was starting to take its toll. The majority of work-

ers had to travel out of the county. Thirty-five percent of all Beltway travelers are commuters from Prince Georges County. A county that is overly residential and lacking in business vitality—retail, industrial and office space.

So let's take a quick look. My two sons go to the University of Maryland, which is in Prince Georges County. UMD consistently has one of the highest crime rates among U.S. colleges. Last semester, a fellow athlete of theirs answered his dorm door. A hit man pushed his way in and put a gun to his head and said "You didn't deliver the stash and now you have to go." It took him 10 long minutes to convince the assassin that it was his roommate or someone else he was after. He moved out of the dorm but was never the same. He is leaving at the end of this semester.

Two blocks down the street from my boys, a home was recently invaded by robbers. One of the victims called 911 as he hid in a closet. The cops arrived and demanded the robbers to come out. They chose to come out with

guns blazing. Cops won—one thug dead, one thug wounded and one escaped. There are so many burglaries in their neighborhood they and their roommates pitched in and bought a dog to watch the house while they attend class.

Daily, and I mean daily, carjacking, rapes, kidnappings, home invasions, murders, etc. about the news coming out of Prince Georges County D.C. has nothing on it. In fact, the D.C. Chief of Police had his personal car stolen. They found it abandoned in Prince Georges County.

A few days ago we hit rock bottom. A board member of the National Black Chamber of Commerce had his home invaded at night. They tied up his three children, struck his wife and demanded with a gun to his head "Cash, jewelry and drugs."

This is horrifying. It is happening with reckless abandon and is starting to get very personal. I am going to sound the alarm. Let's protect our communities.

HARRY C. ALFORD is president/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce. Website: [www.nationalbcr.org](http://www.nationalbcr.org).



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