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EDITORIAL

Let's set an agenda, then work toward goal

This weekend's town hall meeting to address disparities that plague African Americans is a much-needed dialogue, but that's all it can be at this point.

From education to lack of homeownership opportunities, African Americans in Mecklenburg County consistently lag behind whites, much as blacks trail America as a whole. As a result, Charlotte-Mecklenburg African American Agenda is tackling those issues Jan. 5-6 at Charlotte Convention Center. Organizers, led by N.C. Sen. Malcolm Graham of Charlotte, looked to confirm 500 registered participants in hopes of eliciting ideas on how to erase those gulfs.



Graham

Some of the answers can undoubtedly be found in attacking historical biases that make it difficult, if not impossible for many black people to realize the potential and promise of this nation. But it's also telling that at this point in our history, we still trail whites in so many areas despite record high levels of education and economic worth. The sad fact is, much of what ails us is from our own hands, either from ignorance or a communal mindset that rewards permanent victim status.

For instance, black babies are 2.5 times more likely to die than their white counterparts. Of the 27,075 arrests made by Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police in 2005, 67 percent were African Americans, more than double the county's black population. In the 2004-05 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools academic year, 76 percent of black students were achieving at or above grade level, yet whites achievement was at 94 percent.

The town hall meeting is well intentioned, but its success will depend on the organizers' and stakeholders' ability to move beyond ideals to building roads to communities that are impacted by these disparities. Too often, we've been eager to tell the world about what ails us, yet won't put in the legwork required to actually change it. That, as Sen. Graham puts it, "is where the rubber meets the road."

In the days and weeks to come, town hall participants as a group and African Americans as a whole should endeavor to bring as much pressure to bear politically, and economically to force change. It's not enough for us to demand others work on our behalf without expecting similar responsibility among ourselves. Collectively bumping our gums won't fix what's broken. Together, we'll have to get our hands dirty to make any real and significant changes.

Funds still needed for M.L. King Memorial

By Andrew Young and Gary L. Cowger

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

On the bustling morning of Nov. 13, thousands came together to commemorate the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Standing side by side, backs against the wind, people of all races and backgrounds celebrated as ground was broken on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for the memorial to this civil rights legend. Even in death, Dr. King was able to unite this nation.



Young

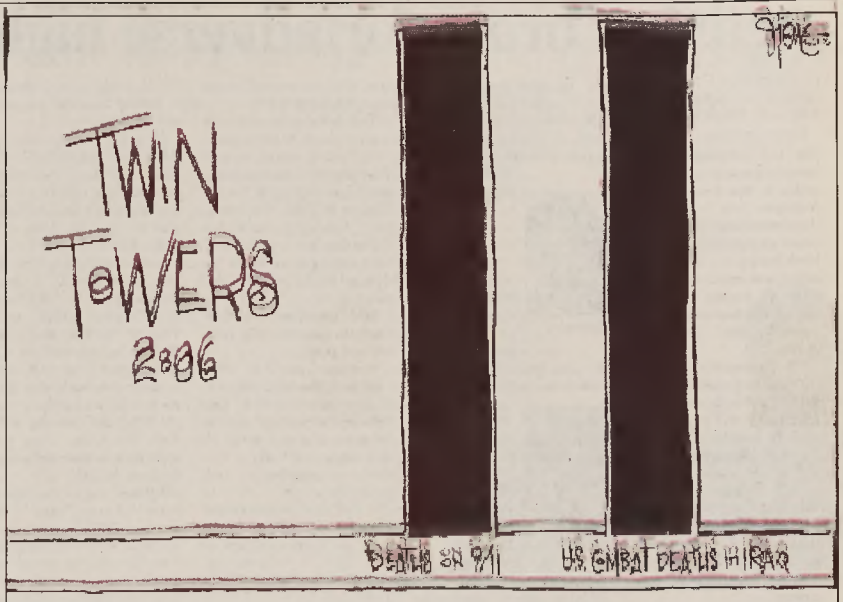
As co-chairs of the Executive Leadership Cabinet of the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Memorial Project Foundation, we owe a deep debt of gratitude to all of those whose generous support made the groundbreaking possible. However, we must keep in mind that amidst the excitement, and the wonderful media coverage of the historic groundbreaking, one important fact remains: Our job is not yet finished. The Washington DC National Memorial cannot be completed until we reach our goal of \$100 million. So far, the foundation has raised \$70.4 million.

There is no doubt that Dr. King is a hero for all of humanity and his rightful place among our nation's greatest leaders on the National Mall is overdue. Now, we must not rest until his memorial becomes a permanent, physical reminder that all people are created equal and that racial injustice cannot be tolerated in a civil and free society.

Dr. King was a staunch defender of such freedom and equality, and he put his life on the line to free all Americans regardless of one's race, color, creed or national origin — from the tyranny of inequality. Our nation — indeed, our world — is a far better place because of the life he lived and the calling he answered. His place in the pantheon of American leadership enshrined on the National Mall is well deserved.

By joining our actions with our intentions, we can ensure that the construction can begin in 2007 as scheduled. We hope that we can continue to build upon the dream he began so many years ago. To contribute, please visit www.buildthedream.org for more information. We appreciate your generosity, and we hope to return to Dr. King's site on the Mall in 2008 to reveal a finished monument, one worthy of his historic and noteworthy contributions to this great country.

Former United Nations ambassador ANDREW YOUNG and GARY L. COWGER of General Motors are co-chairs of the Executive Leadership Cabinet of Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, Inc.



Quarterbacks and affirmative action

As we approach 2007, where does the role of affirmative action sit when watching our national pastime?

Sportscasters and historians state that American sports often serve as a reflection of our society. Two of the most important stories highlighting this viewpoint are the career stories of Jackie Robinson and Jesse Owens.



LENNY McALLISTER

These gentlemen — along with others including Satchel Paige, Jack Johnson, and Joe Louis — were able to create milestones for others to build from.

One such person that had specific relevance in my life was NFL quarterback Doug Williams. Mr. Williams' class, talent, and potential caused me — a staunch supporter of the local Pittsburgh Steelers during my childhood — to approach NFL blasphemy: having to root for another football team aside from the Steelers despite my home locale of Western Pennsylvania.

As a young black quarterback, I felt that much of my allegiance should go to people like Doug Williams, Vince Evans, and others — black quarterbacks that made it in

the best American football league in the world — players that made it easier for me to find acceptance as a quarterback.

One can see that a lot has changed from their playing days. The fruits of their harvest — from the microcosm of society that is sports — can be seen on January 8 in the BCS Championship game. It is the first time that two African-American traditional-style (i.e., drop-back passer) quarterbacks have started for the teams facing off for the championship.

If I were still that kid back in Pittsburgh, it would be more difficult to choose allegiances.

One has to ask: are we past the point of picking sides in support of underdogs — athletes and other sports figures that hold previously-unattainable positions merely because of former trends of racism? If we are past this point in time, are we past a point in time where rules and laws are needed to ensure that African-Americans receive opportunities to all available playing positions in football?

It is an interesting argument.

It is no longer unusual to find black quarterbacks. Schools that had reputations (fairly garnered or otherwise) of converting black quarterbacks into other position

players can now be found starting, developing, and supporting black quarterbacks. One must also look at the fact that the game — as well as society — has changed in many ways over the past 20 years. Is the current reality of black quarterbacks a matter of adaptation to the game's demands on the part of coaches, a change of heart on the part of recruiters and coaches, or the result of affirmation action philosophy making its mark?

With three Heisman Trophy-winning black quarterbacks since 1989, one can make the case that coaches simply aren't looking at high school black quarterbacks as "athletes" anymore. If this is so, do we as African-Americans stop looking over the shoulders of coaches and recruiters alike, anticipating

a move based on race instead of talent?

Perhaps we are at a point of time where allegiances should go back to where they belong: to the team playing versus to the player performing. Perhaps it is time to step away and live up to the credo that we have been saying throughout our racial struggle: give everyone regardless of skin color an equal opportunity and let the best man win, enjoying the results therein.

That's what I'll be doing on January 8 when Heisman-winner Troy Smith and Ohio State take on Charlotte's Chris Leak and Florida.

It should be one heck of a game, history aside.

LENNY McALLISTER is the president of the Lincoln-Cheatham Club of Mecklenburg County.



FILE PHOTO/DAVE NASH

It is no longer unusual to find black quarterbacks starting in the NFL, like the Atlanta Falcons' Michael Vick.

Recipe for the next African genocide

First there is Ethiopia. This nation, which is second only to Nigeria in African population, is landlocked. This frustrates its economic growth as its exports leave the nation mostly via air which is extremely expensive and the road which is very dangerous and unreliable.



HARRY ALFORD

Ethiopia wants a seaport and has fought its neighbor Eritrea throughout the decades trying to seize the beautiful seaport capital of Asmara. The Eritreans have proven themselves to be fierce fighters and have resisted every attempt with the last conflict ending in 2000. Lately, Ethiopia has turned its attention to war-torn Somalia which has a very attractive and extensive coast line on the Horn of Africa viewing sea lanes to and from the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

Somalia is a basket case. The movie "Black Hawk Down" detailed just how difficult this can be to a large, awkward world power like us. The war lords have drifted into two major camps. One is comprised of Islamist extremists who are becoming

quite chummy with al-Qaeda. Osama Bin Laden has been quoted as saying Somalia will be the setting for the next big regional conflict against the "Crusaders." The other camp is Christian, more or less, and is seeking protection and moral support from Ethiopia.

Then there is Eritrea. This small nation strategically located on the Horn of Africa has a violent past with Ethiopia. Throughout the last 150 years there has been massacre, battles, general conflict one right after another. If you want to listen to instilled resentment and hatred, have a conversation with some Eritreans about their opinion of the Ethiopian governments during the last few generations. They each have personal tragedies that they blame on Ethiopia. If you really want to see some excitement attend a cocktail party in Washington, D.C. where the room is populated with both Eritreans and Ethiopians (Eritreans are the "high yellow" ones) and watch how volunteer segregation works. Whatever Ethiopia supports Eritrea will oppose. Thus, Eritrea supports the Islamist extremists who have recently declared Jihad (Holy War) against Ethiopia and the

Christian Somalians.

The above are the main ingredients. Two nations of people who have been fighting against each other from generation to generation joined together with a nation that has no official governing body and has become a virtual 24/7 battleground for all inhabitants. What is needed in this region is sophisticated agri-business. Water reservoirs, effective irrigation and big time farming strategies to feed the huge populations and prevent the recurring famines and medical disasters such as HIV and malaria are what we and the so-called United Nations need to do here. But no the "wild, wild West" (us) has another plan.

In our infinite wisdom, the United States has begun to train the Ethiopian Army for battle in Somalia. That's right, we are about to start a proxy war. U.S. trained troops have already entered into Somalia to fight the Islamists. This has caused Eritrea to go on the "nut". They in turn are sending troops into Somalia to boost the Islamists. As you read this, a U.S. Task Force headed by an aircraft carrier is in route to park itself off the coast of Somalia. Thus, al-Qaeda is responding in kind, through recruitment and

locating their wildest to enter into Somalia and assist in the new Jihad. We are pouring gasoline on something that is already very hot.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, "Because the United States has accused Somalia of harboring al-Qaeda suspects, the Ethiopian-Eritrean proxy conflict increases the opportunities for terrorist infiltration of the Horn of East Africa and for ignition of a larger regional conflict." This is getting ready to blow up. Meanwhile, the UN is typically pontificating and theorizing about the matter.

We need to send doctors, medicine, educators, entrepreneurs and funding for modern infrastructure and agri-business. Providing unlimited weapons and fire power is not going to be the answer. We have yet to learn from the Rwanda, Congo, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone. Simply put, war is not the answer. Marvin Gaye taught us this back in 1969. Why do we do this over and over again when it comes to Africa?

Maybe it's an agenda we don't really know about. HARRY ALFORD is co-founder and president of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.