

# Thomasville Times

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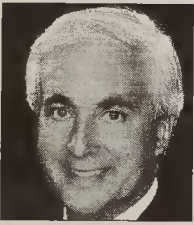
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## Race against time

### VIEWPOINT



PETER FUNT  
 Syndicated Columnist

One headline after another seems to confirm that racism remains a serious problem in America. Yet, while deeply disturbing, the situation is neither unexpected nor necessarily an indication of a significant shift in the nation's character.

Present conditions - from economic distress at home, to war and the specter of terrorism abroad - create a perfect storm for racial upheaval. Over the last decade, three developments in particular have stirred those with racial bias to erupt, much as bees react when their hive is disturbed.

The first was 9/11, which, along with lesser acts of terrorism that followed, triggered legitimate fears among many Americans, while also inviting inappropriate prejudice against those of Muslim lineage. Then came increases in illegal immigration in the Southwest at a time of severe nationwide unemployment, making latent bias against Latinos boil over. And there was, of course, the election of the nation's first black president, which has become an emotional call to action among closeted and cowardly Americans for whom equal rights is more an abstract concept than a philosophical way of life.

Within this triad of racial hatred, the bigotry exposed by Obama's Presidency is in some respects the most painful, and yet the easiest to understand. The election of a black chief executive did not, in and of itself, move the line that separates the fair from the biased. It did, however, underscore how far the nation had progressed to that point, and it challenged — perhaps even dared — the prejudiced among us to reveal themselves, which is what they are doing.

Overt acts of racism can be limited by laws or curbed by social pressure, but an actual shift in the nation's consciousness takes generations to accomplish. Moreover, each period of meaningful racial progress, such as occurred in the mid-sixties, is often preceded by vocal and even violent outbursts, as the fearful become more threatened.

In his memorable speech on race during the 2008 cam-

paign, Barack Obama spoke of his white grandmother, "a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe." People who struggle, and overcome the fear that leads to racism are, nonetheless, said Mr. Obama, "a part of America, this country that I love."

Such compassion was sorely lacking among administration officials who reacted in knee-jerk style last week when the deliberately distorted video of Shirley Sherrod, an official in the Agriculture Department and an African-American, caused a political and media firestorm. Although it was not clear at first, Sherrod was actually using her own life experiences to underscore how racial bias is difficult to overcome — a process that in her case took many years, and was similar in many ways to what President Obama had recalled about his grandmother.

For all the parsing of Sherrod's speech, little attention has been given to the message she actually sought to deliver at the NAACP dinner last March, on the 45th anniversary of her father's funeral. He was shot in front of three white witnesses by a white man, who an all-white jury refused to indict. That's when she dedicated her life to helping black Americans escape the racial hatred that her family faced.

"I've come to realize," she explained, "that we have to work together and — you know, it's sad that we don't have a room full of whites and blacks here tonight, because we have to overcome the divisions that we have.

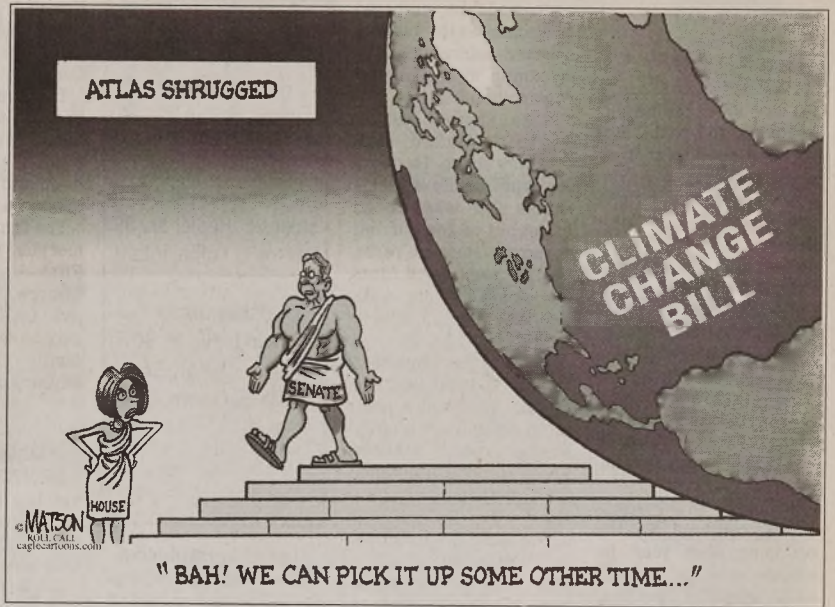
"Our communities are not going to thrive ... our children won't have the communities that they need to be able to stay in and live in and have a good life if we can't figure this out. White people, black people, Hispanic people, we all have to do our part to make our communities a safe place, a healthy place, a good environment."

Added President Obama at week's end: "If there's a lesson to be drawn from this episode, it's that rather than us jumping to conclusions and pointing fingers at each other, we should all look inward and try to examine what's in our own hearts."

That's a small and painful process, as Shirley Sherrod discovered, as must we all.

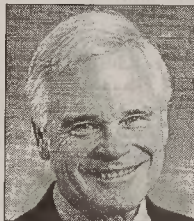
*Peter Funt writes about newspapers at www.FuntFronts.com and is a writer and public speaker. He's also the long-time host of "Candid Camera."*

## OPINION



## Stock cars and bootleggers

### VIEWPOINT



D.G. MARTIN  
 N.C. Columnist

What is North Carolina's favorite sport?

For lots of North Carolinians it is stock car racing — the NASCAR variety. Even those of us who are not NASCAR fans take pride in a sport that we think got its start here and has been a home to many of its heroes.

We take pride in the North Carolina moonshiners who honed their stock car driving skills by outrunning the revenuers. It is a mythical fascination like we have for the outlaw pirates on our coastal waters 300 years ago.

We worry when we read this week in the *New York Times* that television ratings for NASCAR in the important young men demographic (19-34 years old) declined by 29 percent last year.

Could the age of NASCAR be over?

Not likely. Not in our lifetimes.

But there may have to be some changes in our views about the history of stock car racing and our state's connection to it. We may have to share credit (or blame) for the beginnings of stock car racing.

The challenge to North Carolina's claim to a preeminent role in stock car racing

history comes in a new book, "Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay, and Big Bill France," by UNC-Asheville history professor Dan Pierce.

Pierce's entertaining discussion of the "hell of a fellow," mill village, fair-ground red clay race track, and moonshine culture gives some credit to North Carolina for early stock car racing. But, he writes, big-time racing got its start before World War II in Daytona Beach and Atlanta where big crowds and big prizes drew the best drivers. In these venues an ambitious young driver and promoter, Bill France, began a career that led to his successful effort to consolidate and control stock car racing.

Ironically, it was bootlegging that led to a major shift of stock car racing to the Carolinas after the end of World War 2. Led by Atlanta Constitution editor Ralph McGill, drivers with bootlegging convictions were barred from the city's Lakewood track. But many of the best and most popular drivers had been convicted of running moonshine. These popular drivers moved to new racetracks in the Carolinas.

Bill France followed, promoting, building, and owning new tracks. Bootlegging had an under-appreciated role in some of the new tracks. For instance, in North Wilkesboro, France partnered with men connected to bootlegging interests. They developed one of North Carolina's most important racetracks. The same group developed Oconeechee Speedway in Hinesborough.

Pierce tells about another under-appreciated group with ties to bootlegging: mechanics. Without a car that had been modified to

outrun the law enforcer's chase vehicle, even the best driver would be in trouble. The modifications to the pre-war Ford V-8 increased speed significantly. According to former Charlotte Motor Speedway President Humpy Wheeler, the V-8 "became a race car in just a few days with the right hands working on it."

So, when the moonshine running drivers came to the track to race, their mechanics were key players on their teams.

Pierce's story of the creation of the state's only remaining major speedway and the running of the first World 600 at the Charlotte Motor Speedway is worth the price of the book.

Pierce ends his book with the retirement of Bill France in 1972. Thus, he does not cover the closing of the North Wilkesboro and Rockingham speedways, except his detailed description of how Bill France made NASCAR his family's business helps us understand why our historic connections were trumped by money.

Maybe there is some consolation. Charlotte got the new NASCAR Hall of Fame. Its first inductees, other than Bill France and Bill, Jr., are all North Carolinians: Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt, and Junior Johnson.

*D.G. Martin hosts UNCTV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Sundays at 5 p.m. For more information or to view prior programs visit the webpage at www.unc-tv.org/ncbookwatch/. This Sunday's (August 1) guest is Shelby Stephenson, author of "Family Matters: Homage to July, The Slave Girl."*



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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### EDITORIALS

All unsigned editorials are the consensus of Editor Lisa Wall and Sports Editor Zach Kepley