



I advise and enjoin those who direct the paper in the tomorrows never to advocate any cause for personal profit or preference. I would wish it always to be "the voice" and to devote itself to the policies of equality and justice to the underprivileged. If the paper should at any time be the voice of self-interest or become the spokesman of privilege or selfishness it would be untrue to its history.

— from the will of Joseph Daniels, Editor and Publisher 1894-1948

Faircloth's ugly smear

A U.S. senator goes too far when he blames a federal prosecutor for the killing of woman in a carjacking. Prosecutor Janice Cole does not deserve this vicious attack and ought to speak out.

Although Senator Faircloth's mean streak is no secret, his latest nasty indulgence is stunning just the same. Faircloth has blamed, directly and unequivocally, U.S. Attorney Janice Cole for the death of a carjacking victim.

The senator has picked up on speculation by Raleigh police officers in the case of accused carjackers Robert McCrimmon and Dexter Harris. He has made a show of asking for investigations by the Justice Department and the Senate Judiciary Committee, claiming that Cole could have averted the abduction and killing of Jodie Plew in Nash County in March.

Even for a Republican who regularly belittles President Clinton and his appointees, Faircloth levels a grossly unfair slam against Cole, saying that "as a result of her actions one victim is dead."

Harris, the man accused of killing Plew, allegedly had been involved in a carjacking three weeks earlier in Raleigh. At the time, Raleigh police filed charges against only one man, 17-year-old McCrimmon. He conceivably could have been charged in federal court as well, but Cole has a policy of not taking carjackings unless a victim has been seriously injured. That seems reasonable, since it is impractical to haul every such case into federal court.

Some investigators thought Harris might have been involved with McCrimmon in the Raleigh carjacking, but they lacked any evidence to nail him. One problem was that the victim, understandably

shaken by the ordeal, had given a description that did not match Harris. He was only arrested after Plew's killing and a third carjacking, in Florida.

Now, though, some Raleigh police officers theorize that if McCrimmon had faced federal charges in their case, he might have been frightened into seeking leniency and turning in Harris, who would then have been locked up before Plew's murder. This is a stretch, and Faircloth carries it to an absurd extreme, piling huge assumption upon assumption only with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight.

Harris now faces a possible death sentence in Plew's murder and a string of other state charges. Cole has not brought a federal carjacking charge; the Justice Department says federal and state authorities agreed that the state should handle the prosecution — though federal charges remain a possibility if justice isn't done in state court. This, too, seems logical.

But it riles Faircloth, who hints that Cole is not prosecuting Harris because of the involvement of lawyer Theodosius Clayton Jr., the son of Rep. Eva Clayton, who pushed Cole for the federal prosecutor's job. Clayton says he is not Harris' lawyer but only briefly looked into the case at the request of Harris' family. If that's all there is to it, Faircloth is off the mark.

It is regrettable that Cole herself has not publicly commented on any of this. However justified her actions, her refusal to speak leaves the stage to Faircloth. And his performance stinks.

A gesture of reconciliation

Southern Baptists have been given a welcome and overdue opportunity to face the historical reality of their creation while at the same time apologizing for the pain that birth caused others.

A faction within the Southern Baptist Convention has proposed that the denomination acknowledge that it was founded in 1845 by pro-slavery elements in the South. But the proposal, to be considered when Convention delegates gather in Atlanta next month, goes further. It calls on the nation's largest Protestant denomination to apologize to "our brothers and sisters of African descent" both for slavery and for the "bitter harvest of the resulting inequality."

Arguments have already been

heard that modern Baptists cannot erase 150 years of history, and those who label the resolution as little more than a symbolic gesture are correct.

But symbolism is important in a denomination based on faith and the symbols attendant to it. Adopting the resolution would be but a small and perhaps shaky step, but it would be a vital move toward reconciliation between disparate Baptist groups that could only strengthen the denomination.

Southern Baptists do not have a spotless record on racial issues, and this is a good time and good way to begin washing away some of those lingering stains. A gesture of this sort, symbolic though it is, could be of everlasting comfort to those on the receiving end.

We called; they answered

Tomorrow we pluck a moment from our crowded calendars for a day of memories. A solemn time now officially set aside for honoring

those who sleep beneath the good green land. A melancholy moment when flags are lowered to half staff, when hearts and souls are flooded with bittersweet memories of those whose term on

Earth has expired.

Officially, Memorial Day began in the United States as Decoration Day, recognizing the family tradition of placing flowers on graves, honoring the soldiers, sailors and marines of the Civil War. "You youth, who heard duty call," you must!" and replied, "We shall!"

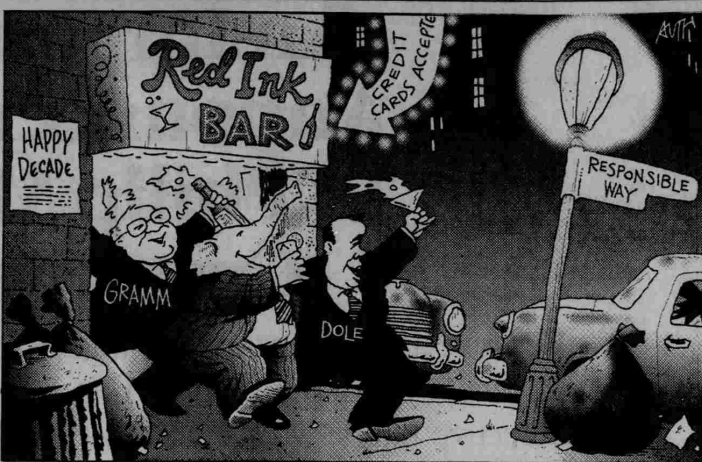
History repeats itself, and the

tradition goes on, new conflicts adding new names and memories to that list of the fallen. For those in final rest, the battle is over, but for those who carry on, it is a time for national remembrance. To pledge that they will not have died in vain. To perpetuate the concept upon which the nation was founded and never forget those who made the ultimate sacrifice toward that goal.

Tears must be wiped away and losses accepted, as life moves on. But memories will remain, as they should, deeply embedded in the recesses of the mind. Our loved ones' spirits, stronger than any marble or bronze monument, have shifted the burden to our shoulders.

Good morning

Tourists now can gawk at Spiro Agnew's bust in the Capitol — but the whole country gawked when he was busted as vice president.



"Can't those poor folks just learn to behave?"

Now we know why thousands of young, unmarried women — teenage girls are who're talking about — get pregnant and have children, completely balking up their lives. To hear conservatives tell it, these girls are just plain spoiled.

That's right, spoiled. Think about that insufferable child (not yours, of course) who's been treated like royalty for so long that she expects her every whim and fancy to be coddled lest she pitch a hissy fit. Think about the smart-mouthed adolescent who's been lavished with material conveniences to the point that he thinks the world owes him not just cars and clothes but a darn good living.

Same syndrome with unmarried teen moms, our conservative friends would hold. Because of welfare payments, making babies for these girls is nothing less than a license to print money so they can afford to avoid work and sit around all day.

Well, the sums aren't exactly in the armored-car range. But they create an expectation that society will help cover the costs of someone's decision to become a mother (or to do what it takes to become one), no matter how shortsighted, impractical or flat-out stupid that choice was.

You're actually rewarded, by this way of thinking, for behavior that's personally and socially devastating. Spoiled rotten, right? (And as for the irresponsible, just-do-it fathers, if there's no particular reward, there's surely not much of a penalty.)

Don't expect me blithely to demolish this line of logic. Let's say this, at least, for the conservative welfare programs: They have a detailed, coherent vision of what they think is wrong, and how to fix it.

As legislation to jerk a knot in North Carolina's welfare system came to a

head last week in the state House, I flipped back through a sheaf of welfare-related screeds mailed out in recent months by conservative dogma-developers such as the Heritage Foundation and the Family Research Council.

They size up the problem this way: Welfare as we've known it is fatally flawed because it has severed the link between help and behavior.

In the good old days before morally bankrupt liberals hatched Aid to Families with Dependent Children, helping hands that were extended to the poor either by government or private charity came with the expectation that one would clean up one's act. But under AFDC, the critique goes, all a woman need do to qualify for unlimited trips to the government pay window is propagate.

On this is heaped blame for the nation's appalling rise in out-of-wedlock births. And as the stable two-parent family begins to look as outmoded as a Saturday Evening Post cover, poorly raised children fall prey to the temptations of promiscuity, drug use and crime. All brought to you by your friendly neighborhood welfare department, or so the analysis goes.

The conservatives' essential remedy — and Tar Heel Republicans are right in sync — is to withhold cash welfare payments to unwed mothers. Over time, this is supposed to yield a behavioral sea change as these women turn for support to families, churches and other institutions that can apply a coat of moral sheen to people they assist.

It might just happen. Still, I'm bothered by the assumption that

unmarried welfare mothers typically choose that path because they find it attractive, rather than blundering into it for a variety of reasons, the most important being a lack of better options.

It's easy enough for folks secure in the clutch of middle-class comfort to criticize the moral lapses of the poor.

Some have been known to conclude that the size of one's backyard or the opulence of the machine in one's driveway is a dependable gauge of one's righteousness. They're not likely to dwell on the exigencies of life in the absence of decent schooling, housing, employment and medical care.

Making sure none of our citizens lacks those advantages is obviously a massive task. It also costs a ton, as opposed to the savings that conservatives hope to realize by slashing welfare benefits.

But here we confront the nub: Whose responsibility is it, really, to correct the social ills that seem tied to the welfare system? Should we simply expect poor people always to do the right thing — as if they, alone among human beings, could be perfect? Or should we continue facing up to a collective obligation to support destitute unwed mothers, recognizing that they're scarcely in it for the money and that personal blame for their plight only goes so far?

Welfare critics like to describe the present approach as runaway compassion. Given our typical miserliness with programs to help poor people work their way up the economic ladder, I'm more inclined to say that compassion has barely gotten out of the gate.

Let's do all we can, of course, to encourage hard-working, prosperous and loving families. But let's not pretend that the welfare rolls are clogged with spoiled brats who need the feel of the sting of real deprivation to make them behave — while we smugly pocket the dough.

THE PEOPLE'S FORUM

The News & Observer welcomes letters from readers. Letters must be signed and must include the writer's address and daytime phone number. Those selected for publication may be edited. The length limit is 250 words. We prefer letters that are short, and that express timely opinions on topics of broad interest. Inquiries may be directed to 829-4517. Mailing address: The People's Forum, P.O. Box 191, Raleigh, N.C. 27602. Fax: 829-4872. E-mail: forum@nope.nando.com

Questions for Ralph Reed

Your interview with Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition raised some questions that should be of importance to citizens of all religious persuasions.

1) Does Reed really want to see faith-freedom corrupted by an alliance of religion and politics? Faith must be free to call the political powers to task and to work toward the redemption of politics. The current love-making between certain religious leaders and secular politics has an unholy smell.

2) Can Reed get beyond a fixation on the liberal vs. conservative confrontation? It appears that most in the so-called "religious conservative movement" are infatuated with "conservatism." It seems to be their religion.

For those who treasure religious and political freedom and a healthy but independent relationship between the two, this is a time to be extremely careful. Our faith-freedom is in danger of being perverted by would-be "rulers in high places."

Wake Forest

A left-wing church

I was sorry to learn that Sen. Robert Dole and his wife, Elizabeth Dole, have decided to stop attending Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington. Sorry but not surprised. The denomination's membership has shrunk from more than 11 million in 1968 to a present 8.7 million members.

Many are voting with their feet. It would be preferable for them to stay in the church, withhold their funds and protest loudly the actions of the hierarchy and leadership. This course of action would eventually get the church's attention.

The reason so many have left is because the UMC has become a far-left church bureaucracy out of control. How have they demonstrated this? Year after year church agencies claim to speak for the 8.7 million members when in fact they do not, while endorsing controver-

sial, often radical, political causes such as support for human rights, anti-democratic foreign governments; opposition to nearly all U.S. military efforts; opposition to voluntary, student-led school prayer; and support for the homosexual agenda.

The above did not include assailing certain Christian beliefs and training clergy to preach all but Jesus Christ.

We encourage members not to leave. Instead, withhold any financial support and protest loudly in writing.

JIMMY R. CASH Sr.
Vice President
Concerned Methodists

Keep the prison key handy

I was relieved to learn that the Rev. Jim Bakker has been released from prison, convinced all along that his sentence was unconscionably harsh. I welcomed the news that Eddie Hatcher with a terminal illness could return to his home in Robeson County. I look forward to the early release of all the Little Rascals prisoners and to the time for reconciliation and peace at the last in the anguished community of Edenton.

Since such a small portion of the inmates at the Woman's Correctional Center are there for crimes of violence, and with access to alternatives to prison, I would urge the setting free of at least one

half within a month.

Since some 65 percent of the total prison population are incarcerated because of something called substance abuse, I strongly recommend that the state begin a mass exodus of non-violent drug consumers and that all of us take a sustained look at the whole kit and caboodle of the futile and counterproductive drug war.

And after an eternity of 37 years, and posing no threat to society, and now aging, I plead for the privilege of Frank Wetzel to spend his last years at home with his wife.

All Christians might well view the prison issue in light of the words used by the Founder of the Faith in inaugurating his mission: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me: He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

This ought to tone down our lock-'em-up-and-throw-away-the-key rhetoric, and slow down our feverish building of new prisons.

Raleigh

W. W. FINLATOR

Back to Iowa

I enjoy reading The People's Forum. I find some of the letters more amusing than the comics!

I have an excellent suggestion for the woman from Durham who wrote, "I was born and raised in Iowa, a state ranked second in the nation on scholastic test scores. Now I live in a state scraping the bottom of the barrel. This is unacceptable to me." She added that she is angry that she will have to work a second job to send her child to a private kindergarten.

I suggest that she take the money she will have to pay to a private kindergarten and buy a ticket back to Iowa. In that way she will be happier and will release two jobs for two people who enjoy living and working in North Carolina.

Southern Pines

ALICE CRAIG

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