

## The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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# Is clock ticking on black Charlotte?

By Nicole Bryant

SPECIAL TO THE POST

Dr. Tom Hanchett from the Levine Museum of the New South recently spoke at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church off Beatties Ford Road. His presentation titled: "From Segregation to Salad-Bowl Suburbs" described Charlotte as being the New South and bringing people from all around the United States.

He spoke about the concept of many people in places of power and in higher levels of the current caste system of this county were asking the question during the September 2016 riots: Why are blacks so angry?

After providing a brief history lesson about how voting policies such as poll tax affected African-Americans in voting, red lining, federal-funded mortgage freezing from banks to lend to African-Americans, Jim Crow laws and busing and the prevalence of blacks being strategically pushed to certain geographic areas to live in Charlotte, many people attending that evening at the church asked Dr. Hanchett

for a solution as to present day Jim Crow.

After he discussed that he had recently paid off his mortgage and was a homeowner, he hinted to bring races together by engaging in mural painting on expressway walls. It was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who reported, "Because our expressways carry us from the ghetto, we don't see the poor." I would disagree with Dr. Hanchett as to beautifying the mere object that is segregating races and classes of people to spark political and economic change.

I'm not satisfied with his solution.

I wonder, by 2020 is gentrification going to be the reason for many black people being displaced into the suburbs; away from mass transit, resources and inner city supports? Or by 2020, are the people in Biddleville going to still be living freely in their homes, seeking availability of resources and living at optimal behavioral functioning? The Charlotte City Center 2020 Vision Plan proposes the latter is far-fetched.

According to research in "Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States," Charlotte is ranked dead last (50) as to upward mobility for children moving out of poverty if they are currently living in the lower fifth percentile of poverty. This is in a city that is second only behind New York City as to banking and finance.

· 73.63 percent of the people living in Biddleville are African-American

· Majority earn less than \$40,000

· Over 1/4 earn less than \$25,000

· Almost 1/4 earn less than \$10,000

· 36 percent receive income from Social Security benefits

Most in need of attention in the county, per the 2013 Mecklenburg Community Health Assessment:

1. Chronic disease and disability

2. Mental health

3. Access to care

How does this affect African-Americans? African-Americans are least likely to

seek care. Blacks don't get a checkup or talk about their feelings to a counselor the same way White-Americans do. Even more, when blacks do access care they are accessing care for more complex medical issues than white Americans.

Based on the current trajectory of high-rise condominiums and half-million dollar homes settling peacefully in Biddleville, the statistics as to poverty and income levels of this area, the research report ranking Charlotte, NC dead last as to the unlikelihood of upward mobility for poor children, the poor and underdeveloped schools black students attend, the lack of mental health and substance abuse human service agencies on Beatties Ford Rd and the 2013 Mecklenburg Community Health Assessment's core needs; is there a systemic plan to eliminate a whole race from the city of Charlotte, NC?

By 2020, will the African-American population be exterminated in a modern form of genocide at the amoral hands of the city of Charlotte?

## Cost of your vote

Fifty-one years ago, on March 24, 1966, the United States Supreme Court struck down the last poll taxes in this country. It was a victory for the American people and for the case's lead plaintiff, Annie A. Harper, an elderly African-American woman who could not afford to pay Virginia's poll tax to cast her ballot.

That spring, it looked like the United States was on its way towards a democracy where all voting-age Americans would have access to the polls. The Supreme Court's 1966 decision to strike down the Virginia poll tax knocked down one of the last pillars of the Jim Crow era. And just the year before, in August of 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, our nation's most powerful tool for protecting the vote.

Now, in 2017, more than 50 years later, the same racial and economic discrimination continues to haunt our elections. Old battles have become new again. As minority voters and low-income Americans face new barriers to participating in our democracy, the anniversary of Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections is less of a celebration and more of a reminder that our fight for voting rights is far from over.

Since the Supreme Court gutted the VRA in its 2013 Shelby v. Holder decision, states across the country have enacted a new set of discriminatory voting restrictions: voter ID laws. After decades of progress, it is open season for erecting new barriers to voting. Voter protections in states with a history of discrimination have been erased, and as states implement voter ID laws limiting access to the polls, the impact of these policy changes is eerily familiar.

When Annie Harper brought her case to the Supreme Court in 1966, her lawsuit asked the Court to rule on a \$1.50 poll tax charged by the Virginia Board of Elections. For a low-income senior like Harper living on a fixed income, that fee was out of reach.

The price of today's barriers to voting is just as debilitating and restricting as Annie Harper's poll tax.

Consider the cost of today's voter ID laws. In my home state of Alabama, some rural voters have to drive over an hour to acquire a state-issued photo ID, which can often mean taking time off of work. There are also rural voters who don't have birth certificates or the verifying documents necessary for getting proper identification, and those documents cost money to acquire. For many voters, the hidden costs of obtaining a voter ID create modern barriers to voting.

No democracy should ask voters to make these sacrifices in order to be heard.



TERRI SEWELL

## Small towns, courts, and thinkers

"I have to vote to break a tie on town council's votes all the time," the mayor of a small North Carolina mountain town told a friend.

"When they deadlock it is a 3 to 3 vote,

with the same people always voting together."

When asked if it were a Democrat versus Republican situation, the mayor explained that

political parties have nothing to do with it. "Three of them are Methodist, and the other three are Baptist. They just stick together no matter what the issue."

What denominational preference might have to do with where to put a stoplight, how much to pay the police chief, where to extend water lines, what streets to pave, or the

hundreds of small but important decisions his local government has to make, the mayor did not try to explain. Being a Methodist or a Baptist would not seem to matter much, but it did.

The loyalty of these town board members to their religious colleagues robs the town of the benefit of the individual and collective experience and wisdom that council members could apply to working out pragmatic approaches to the town's non-sectarian municipal challenges.

Such local government decision-making should not be handicapped by religious doctrine and loyalties.

Similarly, a small-town government can often do better if its elected leaders face challenges and work together without regard to political party affiliations.

Of course, even in these days of ugly partisan divi-

sion, both at the national and state level, our two-party political system plays an important and constructive role in government. It fosters accountability, provides leadership pathways for potential public officials and gives the possibility of regular changes in leadership.

But, imposing two-party partisan elections and divisions on small local governmental units can be counterproductive.

For instance, in making a decision about whether to run for local office, a moderate independent-minded pragmatist might be unwilling to align with either of the two major political parties to get on the ballot. While it is theoretically possible for a registered independent or unaffiliated voter to find a place on the ballot, the complicated petition requirements make it nearly impossible.

Almost 30 percent of North Carolina voters are registered as independents. Whatever their talents and potential contributions, they are effectively disqualified from serving in any office selected in partisan elections.

That is too bad for small local governments.

It is now even worse for North Carolina's courts thanks to our General Assembly's recent action that makes all judicial elections partisan.

Rationalizing their action, legislative leaders explained that voters were entitled to know the political affiliations of candidates for the judiciary.

True, the political registration of judicial candidates would always be a matter of public record and be reported to voters during an election.



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