

## C O M M E N T A R Y

## So long McKenzie Courts: My childhood home

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I can always count on Lester "Bo" White, a childhood friend from Tuscaloosa, Ala., to keep me posted on the hometown news. Bo's last e-mail contained bad news: McKenzie Courts, the housing project where I spent most of my childhood, is going to be razed. Supposedly, McKenzie Courts will be replaced by townhouses and two-story structures. Supposedly, the people who live there now will get first dibs on the new units. Supposedly, this is going to be a good deal for everyone.

I'm not so sure. We all can cite past instances in which people being displaced were given similar assurances. Yet, after the new buildings were erected, they did not move into them and were forced to fend for themselves.

I hope this isn't the case this time because this is personal, very personal.

I was born in my Big Mama's house at 2721-15th Street. That area had the well-deserved moniker, "The Bottom." We lived three doors down from Big Mama at 2715-15th Street.

In fact, I was born in a three-room house. Most of the houses in The Bottom have been torn down. Whenever I drive on the bypass

that now runs over the old neighborhood, I look down, hoping against hope that I'll be able to see my old shotgun house. A couple of them are left, but most have been replaced by a correctional facility.

That notwithstanding, I was able to comfort myself by being able to drive through McKenzie Courts and pause where we lived: 5-D, 75-A and 52-B. McKenzie Courts was more than a housing project.

To those of us who grew up in The Bottom, Shack Town, Barr's Quarters, or any of the other overpopulated, poor neighborhoods, moving into McKenzie Courts was akin to moving into a wealthy suburb.

And if a family did not keep up its unit — unannounced inspections would expose them — they had to go. No one was allowed to drag the others down.

Mr. Robert L. Glynn, the director of our housing complex, would tell us inspirational stories about how he, as a poor person, was able to attend what is now Alabama State University. Mr. Jimmy McMath and my stepfather, William H. Polk, were the Black his-



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tory experts in the neighborhood. Mr. Robert Wade headed the First Family of McKenzie Courts. Although the Wades were poor like the rest of us, they set the standard of excellence, in athletics and academics. Many, like Sue Willie Thompson, would follow their examples by becoming lawyers or excelling in other fields.

Order was maintained by adults that everyone knew and respected. If they ordered us to do something, that was tantamount to our parents saying it. No one disrespected Miss Dot, Miss Bessie, Miss Edna, Miss Henderson, Mr. Luke, Miss Lottie, Mr. Willie, Miss Ida, Miss Green, Mr. William, Mr. P.A. (for Price Albert), Miss Richards, Ma Sis, Miss Annie Mae, Miss Temple, Miss Mary and so many others.

Big Mama (Sylvia Harris) moved to 23-A. And on Sundays, I'd eat dinner at home and at Big Mama's, too. I don't remember how that ritual got started, but it did. And I enjoyed every moment with my grandmother.

Every kid in McKenzie Courts made trips to the Blind Man's Store, next to the office. I charged my buddies, Jacob and "Shang"

Richardson, a penny to look into my ViewMaster. After a minute, they would have to pay me another penny. I collected the pennies, headed to the Blind Man's Store and bought as many 2-for-a-penny cookies as I could. "I'll see you later," he would always tell us.

The heart of McKenzie Courts, at least for the guys, was the concrete outdoor basketball court. In addition to being a place to play, it was a place to talk trash. "Rabbit," one of the regulars, would always say, "I may not be the best basketball player in the world, but I'm the best you've ever seen." Then, he'd proceed to show us by sinking a long shot.

Howard "Lip" Lanier, who still lives in McKenzie Courts, is the only person I know who could broadcast an entire football game — using only his imagination.

A crowd would gather in one corner of the basketball court as Lip would intone, "Alabama has the ball on the 20-yard line. Joe Namath drops back, looks left, throws right... Touchdown, Alabama!"

McKenzie Courts holds so many fond memories. They can tear down the buildings, but they will never be able to erase the memories.

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## MSNBC's Don Imus would make a great president

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Since some of my readers may not know who this guy is, I'd better clear that up first. Imus is on MSNBC every morning. You may have seen him. He's in a radio studio with two or three other guys; he wears a cowboy hat sometimes; and he has a ranch in New Mexico that serves as a haven for terminally ill children. He is probably the most irreverent, impertinent, brash, fearless, outspoken personalities on television. He has called some very important people some very nasty names — and I just sit there with my mouth open, wondering how he gets away with it and, admittedly, smiling inside at his willingness to do so.

I am not naïve to the fact that Imus is well connected and is providing a certain level of entertainment, but I also believe he is secure in his core beliefs, grounded by his daily work and his contact with suffering children.

## La Grande

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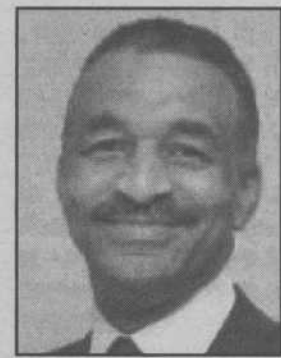
cant in the passing of the civil rights legislation. Notably, all of the Southern Democrats voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In Lyndon Johnson's remarks upon signing the Civil Rights Act, he praised the Republicans for their "overwhelming majority" and did not offer similar praise to his own Democratic Party. Minority Leader Everett Dirksen, an Illinois Republican, collaborated with the White House and the Senate leadership of both parties to draft acceptable compromise amendments to end the Democrat filibuster.

Dirksen took the Senate floor and declared, "This is an idea whose time has come. It will not be denied." For his civil rights leadership, he was presented with the Leadership Conference of Civil Rights Award by then NAACP Chairman Roy Wilkins.

While I have never met him, I think Imus is crusty on the outside, always ready to plant his cowboy boot in someone's behind, but just beneath his radio/TV veneer there's a "genuinely" compassionate man, always willing to help a child or soldiers who have sacrificed so much for this country.

Although Imus is an equal-opportunity basher, willing to call out anyone, what I like most are his political rants. He's a no-holds-barred, take-no-prisoners, kind of guy, regardless of party affiliation or political slant of the bashee. I like that. What I have heard him say over the past four years or so has led me to start this campaign. Oh yes, there is another reason. I figure since the U.S. presidency will continue to be an exclusive club for White guys, Barack Obama notwithstanding, I may as well find a



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White guy that I can support. You' 'da man, Imus!

Here's what convinced me to start campaigning for Don Imus. Do you remember when soldiers were coming home to Fort Stewart, Georgia, and the story disclosed how wretched the conditions were in the barracks they had to occupy? Remember Sgt. Vanessa Turner, who, after lapsing into a coma during her stint in Iraq, came home to her 16 year-old daughter and they ended up being homeless because she could not afford to pay for her medical care? Do you remember Shoshana Johnson and how she was treated after being captured and wounded in Iraq?

There are many soldiers who come home from Iraq, maimed and crippled, having to live under horrid conditions, with little or no financial support, and receive a pretentious, patronizing, compassionless response from our government. Dick Cheney (The Oil Slick) and (I-couldn't-find-a-pen) Donald Rumsfeld always look like they couldn't care less about the men and women who fought in a war the administration so eagerly and gleefully promoted. And Condi? Well, Condi is always her unflappable, stiff, (my hair isn't moving is it?) self. And then there's Georgey Boy. He is too busy threatening Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Korea, well maybe not Korea, to attend the funerals of the fallen are to use his bully pulpit to add money to Veterans' benefits rather than cut their budget.

Well, Imus comes on one morning, outraged at the hundreds of amputees sent from Iraq to Walter Reed Hospital for rehabilitation. After finding out about the soldiers having to pay for phone calls to their relatives, Imus went off! He let the administration have it. I mean he ripped Bush, et al, from one end to the other. He spoke to a Republican congressman on his show and put him on

the spot by making him commit to doing something about the abomination at Walter Reed Hospital. That's when Imus captured my vote for 2008.

The "I Man" suggested, instead of the millions being spent on things like the inauguration and all the other frivolity, why not use that money to help our maimed and broken soldiers? That makes more sense than just about anything this government has done in the past decade. If we cannot and will not provide the very best of care, no matter the expense, for our crippled warriors, what does that say about why we are in this stupid war in the first place? More importantly, what does it say about our "morality," something we like to talk a lot about these days.

If we can elect movie stars, TV actors, athletes, pop singers, and baseball team owners to public office, there is no reason why Imus cannot win the presidency. Just imagine. No child would ever be left behind, really, and those in most need would get all the care they require, especially terminally ill children. Men and women who put their lives on the line for the U.S. would be some of the highest paid and most respected employees in the land, with the best benefits ever. Who knows? Maybe we would have Walter Reed Hospital branches all over the country so the soldiers wouldn't have to travel so far to get the best care available.

The best part would be when President Imus wakes us up in the morning with his haranguing, stinging, irreverent shots at everybody, from Oprah to Falwell to Ted Kennedy to Limbaugh to Michael Moore to Ann Coulter. Why, he might even give me a shot or two for getting him into politics. Maybe I could be the Secretary of Defense, and defend the children, the wounded, and the disenfranchised. Hey, I'm sold. Imus for President! Imus for President!

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