

OUR VIEW

Write A Wrong

The Fourth Estate can't win for losing. The media, it seems, is damned if it does its job—informing the populace on things both good and bad—and damned if doesn't spread the news, particularly on those occasions when it colludes with governments and politicians to suppress information. Opinions of the media change with the seasons of peoples' lives. Many are the celebrities and athletes who complain that the press distorts everything. Yet, those same celebrities and athletes become media whores when the topic turns to self-promotion: selling something they own (clothing lines) or shilling for businesses that have shelled out millions for their services.

For the Black media, and Black media professionals, the issue is compounded; it's a perpetual battle of balance between reporting on the positive and the negative, being hailed for dispensing information and being vilified for distributing it. But like the mainstream media, the Black press and, more importantly, Black journalists are invaluable cogs in the media machine. The presence of Black newspapers and Black journalists in the mainstream media has improved the Fourth Estate, giving talented professionals the opportunity to write and report on important stories in the nation's most esteemed periodicals and corroborating the value of African-American publications, which often break major cultural stories and serve as vital conduits of community information.

All of which makes what's happening in Virginia very scary. Jane and Steven Smith on Tuesday filed a federal lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in Richmond accusing the Virginia Commonwealth University/Times-Dispatch journalism program of racial exclusion. The Smiths are upset that their 15-year-old daughter, Emily, wasn't accepted into the program. They claim the exclusion is because she's White. The lawsuit targets the sponsors of the Urban Journalism Workshop, a two-week summer program designed "to interest minority high school journalists in newspaper careers" — an advocacy outreach.

According to a Wednesday story on the website for *Editor & Publisher*, the defendants are "VCU; Media General Inc., which owns the *Times-Dispatch*; the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, which helped subsidize the program; and eight individuals including *Times-Dispatch* publisher Thomas A. Silvestri."

E&P, citing the *Times-Dispatch* story, said Emily Smith applied to the program in March, got approval via e-mail in April and received an acceptance letter that, according to her mother, said "congratulations—you have been selected. It said there would be a letter confirming that." Days later, the story notes, Emily Smith spoke to a program organizer and was asked her race and said she's White. It's not clear from the story when her acceptance was reneged upon. According to the *Times-Dispatch*, Silvestri and a Dow Jones spokesman declined comment.

This story is sad on many fronts, least of which is the allegation of reverse discrimination. Though innocence or guilt is ultimately up to a judge or jury to decide, the lawsuit undermines the very cause of diversity. For decades, the American Society of Newspaper Editors has lamented the small numbers of minority journalists, particularly African-American professionals, in the industry. Urban journalism workshops such as the ones at VCU, at New York University's College of Arts and Science (underwritten by the *New York Observer*), at Marquette University, at the University of Kentucky and in cities across the country like Philadelphia directly address ASNE's concerns by working with young minorities who aspire to become journalists. Dozens of workshop participants have gone on to populate newsrooms throughout the country. Without them, newsroom diversity and parity with the U.S. population could very well be an unreachable. With them, we stand a fighting chance.

An entire program—indeed, an entire philosophy of piquing the interest of minority youth and encouraging them to explore non-traditional vocations—needn't be imperiled to make a dubious statement about inclusion. A historical injustice is being corrected to achieve parity. Please, don't allow anger over a perceived slight to cripple an urgent effort that continues to bear fruit every day.



Rice pimps rights movement

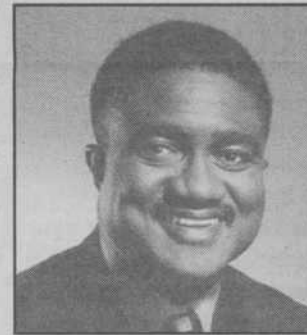
By George E. Curry
Special to *Sentinel-Voice*

When I sat down to watch "60 Minutes" Sunday night, I knew that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would be appearing. I expected the same old run-of-the-mill defense of the Bush administration and, in that respect, she was predictably predictable. But, when the discussion turned to her upbringing in my native state of Alabama, it was clear that this smart, able and doctrinaire bureaucrat was basically pimping the Civil Rights Movement.

She talked in moving terms about the four girls killed in the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. One of them, Denise McNair, "was my little friend from kindergarten" and another, Addie Mae Collins, "was in my uncle's homeroom in school."

Referring to her childhood, Rice said: "Nobody lived in an integrated fashion. Since you couldn't go to a restaurant until 1964, or stay in a hotel, or go to a movie theatre—unless you wanted to sit in the rafters... in the Black only section... colored-only section. And my parents were determined to try and shield me from some of those humiliations."

Rice was 8 years old when that bomb exploded in Bir-



GEORGE E. CURRY

mingham. I was 16 years old at the time. Perhaps because of our age difference, I knew then and I know now, there was no way any parent could shield their children from the indignities of de jure segregation. My mother couldn't shield me from the fact that after working all day as a domestic, she was forced to ride home in the back seat of her employer's car.

My stepfather couldn't shield me from the knowing that if I rode the city bus to town, I would have to sit in the back, which is why I always walked if I couldn't catch a ride with a relative or friend. My parents couldn't shield me from racist ministers appearing on television, saying that if God had wanted us to be equal, He would have made us the same color. Nor could they shield me from being called the n-word or being forced to attend all-Black schools and live in all-Black neighbor-

hoods.

By all accounts, Rice was a Black blue-blood. Her father, John Rice, was a Presbyterian minister and guidance counselor. Her mother, Angelena, was a science and music teacher. And what did they do to eradicate those oppressive conditions that African-Americans were forced to endure?

"My father was not a march-in-the-street preacher," Rice told an interviewer for the *Washington Post*. The decision to use children in protest demonstrations is one of the main reasons the walls of segregation came tumbling down in my home state. But Rev. Rice would have no part of it.

"He saw no reason to put children at risk," she told the interviewer. "He would never put his own children at risk."

And that's the point. Many Black middle-class families refused to confront America's version of apartheid, yet when the doors of opportunity flung open, they were the first to march through them, riding on the back of poor people who were unafraid to take risks.

Many of us teenagers were willing to take risks that many adults wouldn't. I was in the 10th grade when Joe Page, a fellow student at Druid High School, drove us to Birmingham to protest the deaths of those four girls. We were supposed to be in school, but going to Birmingham was the best education I could have received at the time.

Another childhood friend, Ronnie Linebarger, and I were in the middle of most
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