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ajc.com/opinion: Obscenities on television



A lot of heat but little light

B3 Charter schools: Some people support them. A lot of people don't know what they are.

Our oil addiction is killing us, says Tucker. **B6** **Slap a cap** on spending, demands Wooten, **B6**

DEADLINE

How Atlanta's newspapers helped incite the 1906 race riot



Crowds line Peachtree Street after the 1906 race riot. Fueled by newspaper reports of supposed crimes by black men, mobs of whites took to the streets and attacked blacks over a four-day period. At least 25 people — almost all of them black — died. A thousand black residents fled the city.

By **JIM AUCHMUTY**
jauchmuty@ajc.com

When civil rights demonstrations embroiled Atlanta during the early 1900s, the institutional memory of another disturbance decades before tugged at the men who ran the city's newspapers.

The press, they knew, had been implicated in the worst racial carnage in Atlanta history: the 1906 race riot. "All of us at the paper were acutely aware of it," remembers Eugene Patterson, who became editor of The Atlanta Constitution when Ralph McGill rose to publisher. "Mr. McGill and I talked about it. As race relations were heating up again, some of the old-timers around the paper would remind us that this had occurred and that we needed to pay close attention so it didn't occur again."

Patterson was curious about what the Constitution and others had published in 1906, so he dug into the newspaper and did some reading. What he found was a column after column of overheated stories about black men threatening white women and worse.

"It was terribly sensational," he says. "There was no excuse for it. It was incendiary."

This week, as the centennial of the riot is commemorated in a series of events around the city, there will be no shortage of discussion about the causes of the bloodshed that swept Atlanta a century ago. Academics will debate about race-

baiting politics and class tensions and gender roles, but one cause is as obvious as a screaming headline.

"The real spark was newspaper coverage of black sex crimes," says David Fort Godshalk of Shippensburg University, author of a 2005 book about the riot, "Veiled Visions."

Atlanta in 1906 was a fast-growing city of 115,000 with a reputation for progressive leadership. Even then, it was seen as a black mecca — within the strictures of the time. The city was rigidly segregated. Lynchings were not uncommon.

Atlanta's four daily newspapers reflected the era to a fault:

► The morning Constitution, founded in 1868, was known as the voice of the New South thanks to the editorship of the late Henry Grady.

► The Journal (1883) was the leading evening paper and stressed local news and crime coverage. (Both papers were under different ownership then; the current owners, Cox Newspapers, bought the Journal in 1939 and the Constitution in 1956.)

► The evening Georgian, a new entry, was the showcase of editor John Temple Graves, a tub-thumping orator who had suggested castrating black rapists.

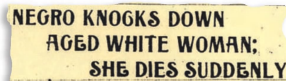
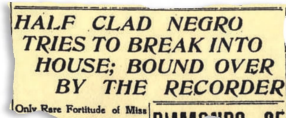
► The Evening News, another upstart, was the scrappiest of the four and was trying to copy the lurid tabloid style of

► Please see **RIOT, B3**



THE RUN-UP TO RIOTING

Newspaper reports, often on the front page, were considered the spark of the 1906 race riot. The Constitution, in condemning the evening newspapers, wrote, "The tragic climax of Saturday night was conclusive evidence of the power of the press over public sentiment."



NOTED

Funny looks and strange lines from the past week

Noblesse obese: Overweight people in the world now outnumber the undernourished, New Scientist notes in its report on the 10th Congress on Obesity in Sydney. "This insidious, creeping pandemic of obesity is now engulfing the entire world. It's as big a threat as global warming and bird flu," said researcher Paul Zimmler in his conference-opening remarks. World Health Organization figures, says New Scientist, show about 1 billion people overweight (including 300 million who are obese) vs. 800 million who are malnourished.

Diss Grace: Nancy Grace's (right) relentless questioning of an unbalanced young mother who later killed herself has drawn widespread vilification for the CNN host. MSNBC yankers called it "ambush television" and a "ratings interrogation." Correspondents on Andrew Sullivan's Daily Dish blog suggested a new Nancy Grace award "for a stunning embrace of crassness and misplaced self regard." The blow-back came from Grace's interview with Melinda Duckett, whose 2-year-old son had disappeared. Duckett shot herself the next day (before the interview tape aired). Grace says she is not responsible for the woman's suicide. "If anything," she told ABC's Chris Cuomo, "I would suggest guilt caused her to commit suicide."



Firing offense? The same day a white gunman shot 20 people at a college in Montreal, a man went running through the halls of Jones County High School, firing a pistol as students sat in locked-down classrooms. But in Jones County, just east of Macon, it was only practice — "a simulated gunman... firing a blank starter's pistol," the Macon Telegraph reported. This was not a firing offense; indeed, no one took offense to the firing. Principal John Trimnell said, "Students were not told in advance of the safety drill." "We had police on every hall to make sure everything went smoothly, and no one reported any problems," Trimnell told the Telegraph. "The drill went well, better than we had expected."

Political football: Claire McCaskill, U.S. Senate candidate from Missouri, bought up 100 of the remaining tickets to last Sunday's Broncos-Rams game so the game wouldn't be blacked out in St. Louis. She then donated the tickets, which cost \$4,400, to schoolkids and to a crisis-intervention center. Recent polls show McCaskill, a Democrat who lost the 2004 gubernatorial race, running neck and neck with the Republican incumbent, Sen. Jim Talent.

Pet or meat? Big mountains and a little tyrant have limited production of food in North Korea, causing chronic food shortages for years. But the government has figured out that rabbits breed like, well, rabbits. And, they're an excellent source of protein.

"Rabbit-breeding farms have been built to rapidly increase parent rabbits which have a high fertility rate, grow fast and produce much meat with less feed," says the state-run official Korean Central News Agency.



► Please see **IRAQ, B4**

U.S.' Iraq tactics embolden militias, insurgents

By **SETH MOULTON**

Approaching the city of Karbala last year for a meeting with a local Iraqi Army commander, my convoy of four Army Humvees came across hundreds of bearded men in green camouflage uniforms lining the road. They were directing traffic and searching vehicles for bombs — good things — and they waved us through, just as Iraqi security forces should.

Seth Moulton was a Marine infantry officer in Iraq from March to September 2003 and from July 2004 to October 2005. He is writing a book about his service. He wrote this article for The New York Times.

But we don't issue green uniforms to Iraqi troops.

After the meeting, I sent an e-mail to my headquarters in Baghdad, asking whether an

entire Iraqi battalion, usually 700 to 1,000 soldiers, had been newly authorized for this relatively peaceful province.

Of course, it hadn't. This was another new militia. And even though the militia had already been approved by Iraqi officials, and recruited, outfitted and deployed in daily operations, no senior American commander in Baghdad knew about it.

Still, it wasn't hard to explain how this could happen in

Karbala, a major city just two hours from Baghdad. There were hardly any Americans there.

The last American base in Karbala was closed in the summer of 2005. Ostensibly our departure was a victory — an area turned over to Iraqi control. The American troops weren't sent home, though; they were simply shifted north to a town near Fallujah, where they were needed more.

For most of 2005, I worked

A noisy debate over charter schools

Both sides could use a reality check

By ANDREW W. BROY

Last month, the federal government issued a study comparing charter school performance with the performance of traditional public schools.

And, as is usually the case when discussing charters, the chairs started flying around the room.

The report, issued by the National Center for Education Statistics, concluded that charter school students did not perform as well as students in traditional public schools, even after taking into account a variety of student characteristics that influence achievement.

Edward J. McElroy, president of the American Federation of Teachers, exclaimed that the study "provides further evidence against unchecked expansion of the charter school experiment."

Not to be outdone, Jeanne Allen, president of the pro-charter Center for Education Reform, said the study used a flawed measure of poverty to

find comparable students and quipped, "This research is no more valid than the government response to Katrina?" Unfortunately, these pitched ideological battles do little to advance the debate.

Study full of holes

To be sure, there are a variety of legitimate reasons to criticize the study. The sample size of charter schools examined in the study was 150 schools out of 3,600 nationally, and even those schools were disproportionately concentrated in three states: Texas, California and Michigan.

On the student achievement question, no attempt was made to determine the test scores of students entering charter schools. As a result, the data reveal a mere snapshot of average student performance and nothing about whether individual student performance improved after the students enrolled at a charter school.

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Andrew W. Broy is director of charter schools for the Georgia Department of Education. He can be reached at abroy@doe.k12.ga.us.

attending traditional public schools rather than charter schools causes improved student performance.

Despite these substantial limitations, however, charter school advocates should be more willing than they are to confront real issues of student performance in their schools. After all, the promise of charter schools is that they offer increased flexibility and freedom in exchange for improved student performance. This is the prize that is often overlooked in the fight.

Success in Georgia

Georgia's charter school student improvement data are more heartening than national trends.

In 2006, charter schools in Georgia met state testing goals — or made adequate yearly progress — at a rate that exceeded traditional public schools. In fact, in each of the past three years, the percentage of Georgia charter schools making AYP exceeded the percentage of traditional public schools meeting the goals.

Furthermore, the majority of charter schools in Georgia boast

achievement scores higher than the comparable district average in 2006. Though these performance levels should be lauded, they should not obscure the reality that some of our students — in charter schools and traditional public schools alike — are not meeting acceptable standards of performance.

What should be obvious, but what bears repeating in the current climate, is that the same things that make traditional public schools succeed are what make charter schools succeed: quality teaching, solid leadership, engaged students and high levels of parental involvement. We need educators, policy-makers and experts to acknowledge this fact instead of warring over the future of charter schools.

Charter schools are growing. Since state school Superintendent Kathy Cox took office in 2003, the number of operational charter schools has about doubled, to 53, with several more to open in the fall of 2007. And every indication suggests that this number will only increase in coming years.

Given that charter schools are here to stay, our focus should be on creating quality, results-driven charter schools. All the while, we must recognize that all of our schools, including charters, should be held accountable for results.



RENEE BROOK/Staff Photo
A cookie walk was part of the attraction for new and prospective students at Marietta Charter School this summer. Charter schools are considered public schools and cannot charge tuition. They are not free to evangelize or promote one religion.

What is a charter school?

By DANA TOFIG

A poll on public education last month offered mixed news about charter schools. On the positive side, more people than ever — about 53 percent — favor the idea of charter schools. On the downside, most people don't know what charter schools are. Phi Delta Kappa, a professional educators group, and pollster Gallup asked these true or false questions about charter schools:

1. A charter school is a public school.

53 percent of respondents said false; 38 percent said true. Among public school parents, 59 percent said false.

Answer: True. Charter schools are public schools that operate according to the terms of a contract that has been approved by the local school board and the State Board of Education. A charter school can request waivers from some parts of state or local school laws, rules, regulations, policies or procedures. In exchange, the school must meet specific objectives outlined in the contract. In other words, in exchange for flexibility, a charter school must promise to show strong student achievement.

One of the most frequent questions I receive is whether students at charter schools have to take state tests, such as the criterion-referenced Competency Test or Georgia High School Graduation Tests. The answer is "yes."

2. Charter schools are free to teach religion.

50 percent — and 57 percent of public school parents — said true.

Answer: False. Like any public school, charters are free to teach religion as an academic pursuit. For instance, students

Dana Tofig is communications director for the Georgia Department of Education. He can be reached at dtofig@doe.k12.ga.us.

can study the Bible, the Quran or any other religious document and its influence on art, politics, history and other parts of society. But charters — like public schools — may not evangelize or promote one religion over another.

3. Charter schools can charge tuition.

About 60 percent said true; 29 percent said false.

Answer: False. Charter schools are funded the same way as traditional public schools. Like any public school, there may be a cost to participate in a particular activity, sport or program. But charter schools cannot charge tuition like a private school.

4. Charter schools can select students on the basis of ability.

About 58 percent said true; about 29 percent said false.

Answer: False. Charters cannot select students on the basis of ability. Any student who resides in the school district in which a charter is located and submits a timely application may attend a charter school. If the number of children exceeds capacity, a lottery or other sort of random selection takes place.

Enrollment preference may be given to students who live in the school's attendance zone, which is defined in the contract. Also, the brother or sister of a child who attends a charter school may be given preference, as well.

For more information, visit the Georgia Department of Education's charter program Web site at www.gadoe.org/pea_charter.aspx.



BOB ANDRES/Staff Photo
Independent reading time is popular at Aman Academy in Roswell, a Fulton County charter school. Since 2003, the number of operational charter schools has doubled, to 53, with several more to open in the fall of 2007, says the state's director of charter schools. He says the majority of charter schools in Georgia boast achievement scores higher than the comparable district average in 2006.

Riot: Unfaked reports provoked crowds' anger

Continued from B1

some of the New York papers. Two black publications also played their trade in the city: the weekly Atlanta Independent and the monthly Voice of the Negro.

In the months leading up to the riot, the Journal and Constitution were locked in a political dogfight in which each paper had a dog. The front-runner in the Democratic gubernatorial primary was lawyer Hoke Smith, a kingmaker who had once owned the Journal and counted the paper's editor as his campaign manager. His chief rival, Clark Howell, was editor and principal owner of the Constitution.

Their contest hinged on race. Smith played to whites by proposing laws to disfranchise blacks. Howell said such measures were unnecessary because so few blacks could vote anyway.

There was an unmistakable sexual undertone to the debate, says Atlanta magazine editor Rebecca Burns, author of a new book about the riot, "Rage in the Gate City."

"The message boiled down to this: If you give black men the vote, they're eventually going to want to be with your wives and daughters."

As the campaign reached a head in the late summer of 1906, a series of alleged sexual assaults seized the newspapers' attention. That August and September, the press trump-

peted a dozen "outrages" by black men. Historians agree that perhaps two-thirds of the cases were unfounded and did not involve crimes.

Nevertheless, the stories almost always made the front page, and the suspect's race was invariably noted in the headline:

Girl Jumps Into Closet To Escape Negro Brute

Bold Negro Kisses White Girl's Hand

Half-Clad Negro Tries To Break Into House

The text routinely referred to suspects as "fiends" and "black devils."

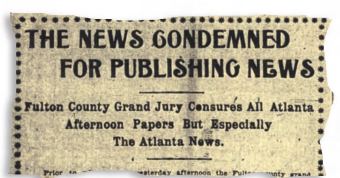
"All of the papers carried these stories," Godhalk says, "but the Evening News and the Georgian really went overboard."

Fanning the flames

The News was particularly obsessed. Editor Charles Daniel applauded lynchings and called for reviving the Ku Klux Klan. He offered a reward for the capture of one assailant, got himself appointed a special deputy sheriff and proposed a News Protective League of vigilantes to defend white women.

On the third Friday of September, as the papers hyped another incident, the News ran an editorial headlined: "IT IS TIME TO ACT, MEN."

They acted the following day. On Saturday, Sept. 22, downtown was crowded with



A Fulton County grand jury censured the Atlanta Evening News for its inflammatory coverage; the newspaper's distaste for the action is reflected in the headline. The News lost circulation, went into receivership and was snatched up by a former rival.

people come to town for the weekend. Through the afternoon and evening, newshybs from every paper except the Constitution hit the sidewalks with extra editions about four new assaults. The stories were based on flimsy reporting — one woman called police because she had seen a black man outside her window and become frightened — but that hardly mattered.

Mobs of whites began to attack black people on the streets. The violence spread and continued of and on for four days. At least 25 people — almost all of them black — died. A thousand black residents fled the city.

The newspapers denounced the mob, but none of them examined their role in goading it into action. The Constitution at least considered the possibility.

"The tragic climax of Saturday night was conclusive evidence of the power of the press over public sentiment," the paper mused, distancing itself from the fulminations of its evening brethren.

Nor did any of the papers seriously question whether their reporting on black crime had been founded on fact instead of prejudice and hysteria.

"The papers all basically blamed black people for what happened," Burns says. Other dailies were more skeptical.

"Atlanta," The New York Sun commented, "is in greater danger from the brutal license of yellow journalism than the lust of the negro."

In the aftermath of the riot, two Atlanta publications — one white, one black — paid for their actions. One became scapegoat, the other a martyr.

J. Max Barber, editor of the

Atlanta Evening News, was infuriated when he read a piece in The New York World blaming the riot on "a carnival of rapes" by black men. But he wasn't surprised when he saw the name of the author: the Georgia's Graves. Barber fired off a telegram in response that was published in the World under the signature "A Colored Citizen."

Barber wrote that craven politicians and irresponsible newsmen, not black criminals, had caused the riot. But he also claimed that some of Hoke Smith's followers had blackened their faces and staged assaults in an effort to arouse support for their candidate.

Atlanta leaders were enraged by the unfounded charge. The telegram was traced to Barber, and he was told to either retract his statement or face prosecution for slander.

"I did not care to be made a slave on a Georgia chain gang," Barber wrote. So he fled to Chicago with his printing press and eventually settled in Philadelphia, where he became a dentist and a stalwart in the local NAACP.

Some escape censure

As for the scapegoat, at least there was a degree of justice involved. Within a week of the riot, a Fulton County grand jury censured the evening dailies for their scurrilous extras, singling out the News by name. The paper ran the story a day late under the disingenuous head: "The News Condemned For

MORE ON THE RIOT

A panel discussion on race and the media will be held next weekend as part of the centennial events planned by the Coalition to Remember the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot. Participants include Atlanta Journal-Constitution editorial page editor Cynthia Tucker and Atlanta magazine editor Rebecca Burns, author of a new book about the riot, "Rage in the Gate City," 9 a.m. Saturday at the Atlanta University Center's Robert W. Woodruff Library. www.1906atlantaraceriot.org.

Publishing News?

But it wasn't just the grand jury that was sore at the News. Atlantans cooled to the paper and its circulation dropped. That winter, creditors forced the business into receivership and its carcass was snatched up by its one-time bitter rival, the Georgian.

"The News became the whipping boy," says historian Gregory Mixon of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, author of "The Atlanta Riot." "I think all four papers should have been censured."

In 1930, former Ohio Gov. James M. Cox bought and closed the Georgian. Only two Atlanta newspapers — the Journal and Constitution — survived long enough to learn the lessons of 1906.