

C-Ville 20

BY C-VILLE WEEKLY WRITERS

Your Starting Lineup. Some of them are well known. Others are strictly behind-the-scenes players. Some make life more livable. Some make us shout back at our TVs (and some give us more to look at on those televisions). Among them are actors, sculptors, teachers, politicians and businesspeople. They come in all shapes, sizes and ages, but they all have at least three things in common: They live here, their influence is felt here and they're being recognized this year by C-VILLE Weekly. Ladies and gents, the C-VILLE 20, Class of 2005: The people and institutions that are shaping life as we know it right here, right now. You can't know the players without a scorecard. Now that we've given you one, get out there and enjoy the game!

The Agitator

M. Rick Turner

During the controversy that engulfed Charlottesville public schools this year, few speakers roused as much passion as Rick Turner, UVA's Dean of African-American Affairs and the head of the local branch of the NAACP. While some citizens appealed to the School Board to justify the proliferation of standardized tests or pleaded for better communication between Central Office and the city's principals, Turner took a decidedly more antagonistic approach. You who oppose the new superintendent are all a bunch of racists, was his charge. White parents don't care about how African-American kids do in school.

Two months after Scottie Griffin resigned her post as superintendent, Turner remains steadfast in his analysis without regard for how his words might have further strained race relations. "I think I've made a lot of people aware of issues they weren't aware of because very few African-American folks talk about these issues," he says with no trace of apology.

Indeed, why would he express regret? Since arriving at his UVA post in 1988, Turner's sense of destiny has grown increasingly intense: "I feel as though I've been chosen to be a strong and honest and forthright advocate regardless of those who criticize my brand of advocacy. It has nothing to do with Rick Turner. It has something to do with being chosen."

Without a doubt, Turner's inflammatory rhetoric helped to focus attention on the disparities among students in Charlottesville's public schools. People who hadn't talked about the achievement gap before had plenty to talk about once Turner's words were broadcast or printed—though whether those conversations always pointed toward a solution is a question still unresolved.

A father of four grown children, three of whom attended city schools, Turner has been quieter in the past couple of months, but that's just timing. No question, he'll be stirring it up again. Maybe soon.

"In Charlottesville I am [living] among a group of frightened and afraid Negroes that are reluctant to stand up for African-American issues," he says, "particularly African-American children who continue to die in Charlottesville."—*C.H.*