

Point of View

The views on these editorial pages are those of the artists and authors indicated. Only the one depicted as the Sentinel-Voice editorial represent this publication.

TO BE EQUAL

CHRISTMAS — SEASON OF COMPASSION

By John E. Jacob

The Christmas season is welcome for a host of reasons, but one that immediately comes to my mind is that it's the one time of the year when it's all right to be compassionate.

Think about it. All through the 1980s, "compassion" was out of style. Using it to describe people's political attitudes was a way of putting them down. It still is.

The Reagan revolution made compassion a code word for unrealistic policies that spent a lot of money helping people who weren't rich. That hard-hearted legacy of the greedy decade continues; there still seems to be little place for compassion in public policy.

So along comes Christmas, and it's temporarily legitimate to think in more humane terms. It's a sad situation when the spirit of compassion that should activate public life throughout the year becomes a season; exercise — an exception instead of the rule.

But that spirit cuts to the heart of what kind of people and society we are.

A compassionate society cares about the less fortunate and develops public policies that reflect humane values. It elevates compassion above greed and is guided by its spiritual values to help the poor, feed the hungry and shelter the homeless.

A compassionate society would seize the opportunity

presented by the Christmas season to reflect on those values and to ease the pain and suffering of the many millions who don't have piles of presents under the tree or family feasts or Christmas bonuses.

It's a time to think about how to help the 20 million Americans who monthly rely on a food bank or a soup kitchen for food ... The 13.4 million American children who are growing up poor ... and the more than one billion people around the world who don't have enough food to live an active life.

And it's a time to think about the way racial intolerance pervades so much of what our nation does.

A case in point is the treatment accorded refugees from

Haiti.

American's compassion has always led it to open its doors to political refugees from the world. But when those refugees are black, there seems to be a double standard.

So the nation that opened its doors to refugees fleeing oppression in Cuba wants to repatriate refugees fleeing oppression in Haiti.

There are legal distinctions between "economic refugees" and "political refugees." But given the documented human rights abuses taking place in Haiti, it's hard to avoid the suspicion that policies denying refuge to Haitians are based on race.

Surely, a compassionate society would grant at least

temporary refuge to black people who brave the terrors of a dangerous sea journey in makeshift boats. We did it for white people from Cuba, El Salvador, Lebanon, Russia, and other unfortunate lands.

Compassion doesn't mean soft or unrealistic for each other, and acting on the notion that we are all responsible for each other, and acting in ways that reflect concern for the well-being of the total community and all its people, of whatever race.

Sure, there are limits to what even the most compassionate society can do. But within those limits a compassionate society can share its blessings and its pain more evenly, and ensure that it treats all people with dignity, respect, and equality.



John E. Jacob

That, after all, is the spirit behind the traditional Christmas wish for peace on earth and goodwill to all mankind.

So in this season of compassion, I would hope Americans will reflect on more than the opportunity to display affluence and status.

I hope we can resolve to elevate compassion to a year-round, permanent feature of our lives ... to care for others as for ourselves ... to bring hope and help to those in need. In the spirit, I wish you and your families a happy, fulfilling Christmas.

United Church of Christ • Commission for Racial Justice

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL REPORT FROM SUDAN: "URGENT HELP NEEDED NOW"

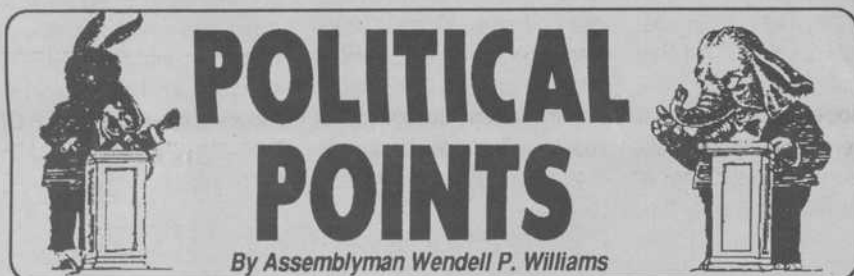
By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

We have just received a firsthand report from the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) concerning the emergency life and death situation in Sudan, Africa's largest land-mass nation. Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese children, women and men are facing death as a result of Sudan's terrible civil war compounded by widespread famine. This is an urgent plea for help.

We are grateful for the support many of you have given to peoples and struggles that we have endorsed in the past. Today, there is no greater human crisis in all the world than the critical situation in Sudan. Many of the Sudanese who are at risk of immediate starvation are the thousands of persons who had taken refuge in Ethiopia from the war in Sudan but are now back inside of southern Sudan.

We spoke with Paul Anade Othow, a native of Sudan and coordinator of the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association, who just returned from a trip to southern Sudan. The world media does not focus on Sudan, yet, mass killings and mass starvation is now

(See Civil Rights Journal, Page 11)



Newsbreak For The New Ship Of Fools

By Wendell P. Williams

About a year ago, the late Amos Knighten, a friend and long time community and human rights activist, gave me a collection of old newspaper articles dated mainly during the year of 1919. I still read with interest not only the stories of those times, but even more interesting is the obvious biases that is constant throughout the stories that involve African-Americans.

After reading them, it would be extremely difficult not to develop an unconquerable fear, distrust, disrespect for the general African-American community by almost anyone. Aside from some of the terminology used, most of those stories mirror many news reports throughout the nation today.

It is no accident that in almost each and every city in America, there are ongoing complaints by African-Americans about how they are portrayed in the daily media. Not

only the negative portrayal, but the lack of representation in positive human interest reports.

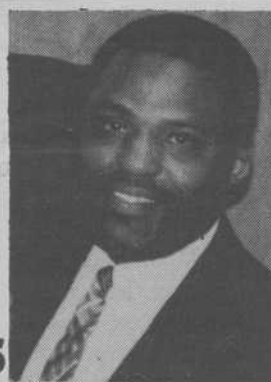
However, since the beginning of our presence in this country, this issue has been a constant complaint. And since that time also, major newspapers especially have made no real attempts to correct this injustice, which consistently perpetuates falsehoods, myths and fear about people of color. You would have to believe that after all this time, we would realize that this mentality will more than likely remain for sometime. The hope that those who evade the truth would somehow overnight change their calculated ways, just won't happen. At least not to the degree to change their attitudes. Realizing that helping to enforce fear can be profitable, and the media is in the business of making money. Of course there is nothing wrong with making money, it is the business of making money on the backs of a single group of people in a negative way that is the real

crime.

As of late, just as many others have in the past, there is a move on many fronts to confront this issue. Some including the NAACP and others are talking about a number of approaches including meeting with editorial boards, boycotts, demanding more sensitive reporters and the list goes on.

The fact of the matter is that, if you really want permanent positive change, then none of these will work long enough to effectuate a real difference or the real truth. These are only short-term feel-good measures. When in fact, the solution is sitting right under our noses this very minute. If you really want the truth told, don't expect someone else to do it, do it yourself. Why spend countless time and energy trying to convince newspapers to treat you fairly, when the simple solution is to read and support our own newspapers.

If we would spend half the time and energy that we use running after others to treat us



Assemblyman
Wendell P. Williams

right, on instead, supporting African-American newspapers that understand our point of view, we would have less problems. It's time to abandon the old "tom" mentality of hoping someone else will like us and stand up for ourselves. If the other papers are so unfair, then why do so many of us subscribe to them and not to ones that are owned by those who look like us?

Boycotting advertisers won't change the views of editors. Meeting with editorial boards will only convince them that they are accomplishing their calculated plan. Stop skinning and grinning trying to convince someone else about us.

I guess in 1992, we still think that the other man's ice is colder. It seems that in 1992 the stories are the same as 1919, just a new captain of the new ship of fools. "The truth shall set you free."

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