

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.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

"CRUEL AND UNUSUAL: THE THOMAS STANDARD"

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Given the astounding high rate of incarceration of African Americans in prisons across the nation, one would at least assume that Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas would have an ounce of sensitivity to the issue of cruel and unusual punishment toward prisoners in state and federal penal institutions. But, unfortunately, Jus-

tice Thomas has acted and ruled against the interest of those who are most often victimized in this society, that is those who are imprisoned.

In fact, it was another "embarrassment" for all communities who respect human dignity for Thomas to write such a ruthless opinion, which could be used to justify prison brutality. Fortunately though, the majority of

the Supreme Court ruled 7 to 2 that excessive force against prisoners is unconstitutional.

The case before the Court was Hudson vs. McMillian which arose out of an incident in Louisiana's infamous Angola State Prison. Keith Hudson was an inmate in Angola Prison and was beaten badly by correctional officer Jack McMillian. Hudson was beaten while handcuffed

and shackled in leg irons and suffered bruises in his mouth, eyes, chest and stomach in addition to having his dental plate cracked as a result of a blow from McMillian. This incident happened back in 1983. It has taken all this time for the case to work through the federal courts once Hudson sued McMillian and other prison officials for "cruel and unusual punishment" in

violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The majority opinion was written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Even though Justice O'Connor is a judicial conservative, she voted to declare the kind of treatment that Hudson received in the Louisiana prison to be wrong and unconstitutional. O'Connor stated, "When prison officials maliciously and sadistically use force to cause harm, contemporary standards of decency always are violated. This is true whether or not significantly injury evident."

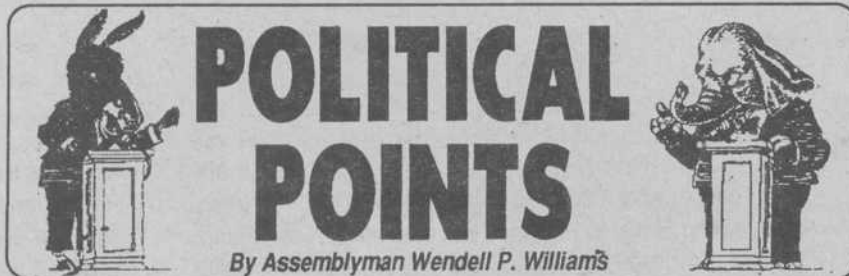
We know that one of the reasons why so many prisoners become repeat offenders is directly related to the manner in which they are treated in the prison system. Brutalizing a defenseless prisoner will do nothing toward rehabilitation. Of course most prison officials know this and that is exactly why prison brutality is so pervasive and permissive in our society. Prison inmates sometimes are viewed as being less than human and thus are the victims of inhuman treatment.

It is said that a prison is a mirror image of the society that maintains the prison. It is important, therefore, that the courts require a standard of human rights in regards to prisoner's rights issues. A society that allows the brutalization of its prisoners is a society in need of change.

Thomas appears to believe

that a prison inmate is not entitled to the standard of constitutional protection from brutality. In his dissenting opinion, Thomas wrote, "Today's expansion of the cruel and unusual punishment clause beyond all bounds of history and president is, I suspect, yet, another manifestation of the pervasive view that the Federal Constitution must address all ills in our society." This goes counter to the sentiments that Thomas testified to under oath during his confirmation hearing before the U.S. Senate. There Thomas has said that he wanted to be on the Supreme Court to "bring something different to the Court" in terms of an interest in helping the court to deal with the underprivileged, in particular the incarcerated.

Thomas had even said to the Senate, "I say to myself almost everyday, But for the grace of God, there go I"...referring to groups of prisoners that he used to see. Well, it is our hope that brother Thomas does not have the misfortune to be imprisoned given his proclivity to support the right of prison officials to beat up inmates. Justice O'Connor put it best in her response to Thomas' dissent. She stated, "To deny, as the dissent does, the difference between punching a prisoner in the face and serving him unappetizing food is to ignore the concepts of dignity, civilized standards, humanity and decency."



By Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams

"BO KNOWS REALITY"

Being one who has dappled in sports from time-to-time, I know enough about what it takes to be a good athlete - a whole lot. However it takes even more to be a one-of-a-kind athlete, like Bo Jackson. Even to be just a good athlete, one must pursue hard work habits, endurance, teamwork, effort, drive and an abundance of natural and developed skills. And even with all of these, there is still no guarantee that one will have a long and fruitful career as a professional or college athlete.

Also, more recently, politics have taken an even stronger position in the arena of sports. Proposition 48 and other policy decisions have sent a clear message that talent alone, will not cut the mustard, and education is still the best investment for your time.

Now back to Bo. Bo was an outfielder for the Kansas City Royals and Chicago White Sox and a running back for the Los Angeles Raiders. He seemed invincible until a recent hip injury that has caused doctors to now say that he will probably never play baseball and football again.

Before Bo's injury I thought,

as well as many others, that Bo would play as long as he wanted to. Fortunately however, Bo knew more than football, baseball and other sports - Bo knew reality.

The following is an interview that I did with Bo Jackson in 1989 in Tulsa, Oklahoma on the Importance of Education, long before he got hurt and ended his athletic career.

Jackson: "I was lucky. God blessed me with my athletic talent. I didn't earn that; I just have worked to develop and use the talent.

"Education is different. I have had to work a lot harder at getting my education than I have to be a good athlete. The athletic ability that I was given led to me getting a scholarship to Auburn University. If I hadn't received a scholarship, though, I still would have gone to college. I don't know where I would have gotten the money but I would have gotten it somewhere. Nothing would have stopped me from getting my education.

"At Auburn my major was in Child and Family Development. I also played three sports. When I left to play professional baseball, I was a little short of graduation. So, in the time between baseball and football, I am always back in school.

It doesn't matter how long it takes. I will get my degree. A lot of people don't understand that. They say to me - 'Bo, with the money you're making from sports and endorsements, you won't ever have to work again. Why do you care about your degree? Why is school so important to you?' I usually tell people that it is because of a promise I made to my mom a long time ago. That's true but it's really only half the truth.

"In reality, when I was little, education wasn't very important to most people where I came from. Most people never finished high school. And, very few went to college. I was lucky though because I have a mother who truly understood the importance of education. When I wanted to play with the guys, Mom was always on my back about school. She told me a thousand times that I wouldn't amount to anything if I didn't get my education. At the time, I did not understand how smart Mom really was and how dumb I was.

"One day I will be through with sports. I don't know when and I don't know why, but it will end. My speed may go or I could be hurt. Sports will end. But, education will last me for my whole life. It is something that nobody can take away from me.



Assemblyman
Wendell P. Williams

"The odds are about a million to one against sports being a young person's ticket to a better life. Education has much better odds. While education is not a guarantee to a better life, the lack of education is almost a certain guarantee of a very low standard of living.

"Sometimes the education road seems endless. It seems like you'll never get there. And somebody is always trying to get you to take a wrong turn. But you can't get off the road. If you do take a wrong turn, you've got to double back and get on the right road. The longer you wait or the longer you stay off the right road, the harder it is to get back in the right direction.

"You've heard the talk about 'Bo knows this' or 'Bo knows that.' Of all the things I do know, there is nothing I know more than this: if you do not work as hard as you can and get the best education you can, you will regret it the rest of your life. So don't make any excuses, just do it! —"

Whether you choose sports or something else, choose to know reality, because if you don't deal with reality it will someday deal with you.

LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Brown Publishing Co. Inc.,
1201 South Eastern Avenue • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 383-4030

Betty Brown, President & Publisher-Editor
Lee Brown, General Manager
Ramon Savoy, Advertising & Marketing Dir.
Lourdes Cordero-Brown, Office Mgr.
Willis Brown, Production
Don Snook, Graphics
Charles Jenkins, Distribution

Contributing Writers:
Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams
Ray E. Willis (CCSD)
Rev. Jesse Scott (NAACP)
Dr. James S. Tate, Jr. M.D. (NAARPR)
W. G. Ramirez
R. K. Brown
Gwen Walker
Kimberly Bailey

Members:
National Newspaper Publishers Assoc.
West Coast Black Publishers Assoc.
This newspaper is audited by:
Community Papers Verification Service,
6225 University Avenue, Madison, WI
53705 (608) 238-7550

Subscriptions payable in advance
Six months \$15.00
Twelve months \$25.00
The rates apply to Continental
United States Only