

# Point of View

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## CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

# A "COMING TOGETHER" IN LOS ANGELES

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Just a few days ago, we had another opportunity to sit with some of the "youth leaders" of South Central Los Angeles. It was most encouraging to see former "gang members" take serious the challenges of community development in the wake of this nation's largest and most explosive "uprising" in this century. There have been numerous press accounts concerning the "cease-fire" or "truce" between the "gangs" in South Central and in other sections of Los Angeles. Yet, the real atmosphere in some of the areas known in the past for violent confrontations between rival

gangs is something more than a climate of "cease-fire" or "truce."

The "word in the hood" is that what is taking place in the African American community in Los Angeles is a "coming together" in unity and peace in order to struggle against the evils of racism, economic exploitation and genocide. This is why the police and many others cannot understand this unexpected and in some quarters undesired unity among the tens of thousands of youth in Los Angeles who have taken their own initiative to stop the killing.

What if this spirit of "coming together" would spread to other cities in the United States? What

if the laying down of guns by the Bloods and the Crisp in Los Angeles is a prelude to taking serious the prevention of drugs in the community? We believe that the young men and woman who are involved in this welcomed "coming together" should be supported and applauded. The eventual outcome of the situation in South Central Los Angeles will have national implications.

We are, therefore, categorically in opposition to the White House program known as "Weed and Seed." The U.S. Department of Justice along with other federal agencies are now attempting to make Los Angeles a

national model for "wedding out" gang members and "seeding in" questionable social projects. Why does the recent decline in fratricide in South Central make the government nervous? Why have some police officers in Los Angeles expressed "astonishment" because the "coming together" in L.A. is working and improving?

The urban crisis throughout the nation will not be solved by the implementation of programs like "Weed and Seed" because as presently designed these programs will actually cause more violence and death. Youth who wind up in gangs should not be "mowed down" like cutting

undesired weeds and grass. Why has President Bush not commented on the positive initiative of the youth in L.A. not to riot, not to kill but to bring peace and unity to the community?

While in South Central L.A. we also witnessed the efforts of community leader and activist, Fred Williams. "Mr. Fred", as he is affectionately called by the youth in the housing projects in Watts, is President of the Cross Colours Common Ground Foundation.

For a three day period, Williams and the foundation sponsored a back-to-school free hair cut marathon. Thousand of youngsters from Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts, and Nikerson Gardens housing projects received free haircuts, book bags, school supplies and Cross Colours clothing. "Mr. Fred", is an ex-gang member and at the age of 33 he has gained the respect of all ages in the community for his 16 years of working to "retrieve high school drop-outs." In addition, Williams has been working hard to help ensure that the "coming together" continue to hold.

One theme of the Cross Colours Common Ground Foundation is "Education is the Key." The foundation has placed an emphasis on the importance of getting an education and has motivated thousands of youth to stay in school until graduation. One of the great challenges of our time is to provide quality school education on an equal, non-discriminatory basis for all the children in every state in the nation.

Community development goes beyond the construction of buildings and streets.



BENJAMIN F. CHAVIS, JR.

All of the people who live in South Central L.A. as well as the millions of persons who reside in the inner cities across the country, must be given a chance to participate in the economy meaningfully through employment and ownership of businesses.

But a key component of any effective community development should be the focus on youth involvement and training.

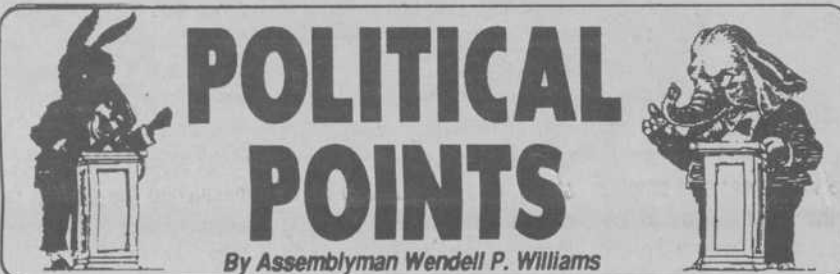
It appears that thousands of young people in Los Angeles and in other cities know what time it is and they are rightfully demanding a voice and presence in all efforts to "reclaim urban America."

As the 1992 Presidential Campaign moves into the final leg, it will be of interest to note how these issues of community empowerment will be viewed by the candidates.

One thing is for certain, the problems of Los Angeles before and after the "uprising" are the problems of the nations as a whole.

In the meantime, we will be highlighting the good and constructive effort of persons like Fred Williams and the Cross Colours Common Ground Foundation, 2164 E. 25th Street, Los Angeles, California, 90058.

The emergence of positive, nonviolent, brotherhood and sisterhood in Los Angeles signals the possibility that this "coming together" can and should emerge in every village and city.



## YOU MAKE THE CALL

The voter turnout in last week's Clark County primary elections, really makes one wonder just how serious the people really are about controlling the political direction of the lives. There is a constant proclamation by many people, not only locally, but throughout America, that they are fed up with the way government is ran and they want more of a say. The talk is loud, but the actions are something else!

Lets take a look at last week's people turnout to control their government. First of all, keep in mind that the majority of eligible Clark County residents are not registered to vote at all. Currently there are only 354,712 registered voters here locally. Of that number only 133,088 people went to the polls last Tuesday (37.5%).

This means that the majority of the voters are allowing 37% decide the fate for the other 63%. Even worse, less than 10% of the entire population is voting to decide the fate of not only themselves but for the remaining 90% who do not

vote at all. What is wrong with the other 90%? Don't they have any concerns or ideas at all? Don't they know that bad politicians get elected when good people don't vote?

Also, it is disheartening to meet so many people that take issue to so many subjects, but are not even registered. Many of these same people claim to be registered, but when the lists are checked, they are no where to be found. Many of these same people will sit in a room and outright lie and raise their hands when the question is asked about how many registered voters are present.

You would think that if we choose not to vote today, we have no voice in our children's or our lives tomorrow. Yes, you would think that at least we would, if nothing else, vote out of respect for those who came before us, and provided the opportunity for us to participate today.

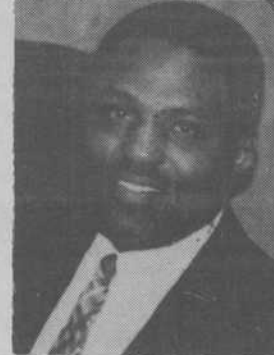
Lets take a quick look back. During the 1950's more than \$75,000,000 of public funds were being spent every year in Southern states on educational institutions that did not admit Afri-

can-Americans. Once we got the right to vote, that changed. However, that right did not come about easily. Even after many courts granted all citizens the right to vote, many states refused to accept these decisions. Many states tried things like having "white primaries." The state of Georgia was one state that refused to accept these court ordered decisions and the white killer of a African-American World War II veteran shot at the polls was exonerated. Think about that the next time you choose not to vote.

Here are a few other things you might what to keep in mind as you sit at home on election day.

1. In 1946 Issac Woodard was blinded by a South Carolina policeman while on his way home from military service, because he mentioned to friends he was going to vote. Think about him.

2. Think about sharecropper Rosa Lee Ingram and her sons, Sammie, 14, and Wallace, 16, who were all sentenced to death in 1948 in Albany, Georgia for slaying, in self-defense, an armed white farmer who struck Mrs. Ingram in the face while



Assemblyman  
Wendell P. Williams

she and her sons were in the fields. Mrs. Ingram had attended a meeting on voting the night before.

3. Think about Harry T. Moore, Florida Secretary of the NAACP, who with his wife, was killed in the bombing of their home on Christmas night in 1951 for hosting a voter registration meeting.

4. Think about people like Medgar Evers, who was gunned down in his doorway as his wife and young children watched, all because of his work with the NAACP voter registration program. And please don't forget the four little Black girls that were blown to bits while sitting in a Sunday school class at a church where a voter registration drive was taking place. Or Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, and the millions of others that gave their very lives to grant a future of political participation for all of us.

The conscience and the choice is yours; exercise your right and duty, or keep living as a 1992 slave.

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