

# 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 represents this publication

## LESSONS OF SOMALIA

By Niger Innis

Two images from Somalia have been seared into our memories in recent months. The first is that of starving Somalians, as they held out their hands and implored for help with silent, sunken eyes. The second is that of civilians sprawled dead on the streets, killed by United Nations gunfire.

Between these two images is a third; The arrival of American troops promising to bring food and peace, bristling with so much hope that the mission itself was proclaimed to the world as Operation Restore Hope.

What troubles me is that the third image, America's military intervention in Somalia, is what linked the first image to the second. As an African-American I am particularly troubled — indeed anguished — by the spectacle of United Nations troops, as part of a U.S. supported operation, shooting and killing unarmed African civilians and of American warplanes bombing in ways that are certain, despite the best intentions and precautions, to wound and kill more Africans. Would the U.N. have ever killed Somalians had America not wrapped itself around the whole operation? I think not.

The killing of Africans in Somalia is partly America's fault. Thus there must be a lesson for us in this. It is that America must become much more cautious and much more reluctant than it has been in getting militarily involved overseas. In the Cold War, obviously, it was easy to get involved and just as easy to justify it — and to justify the casualties and pain. At almost every dot on the globe we were potentially standing up to a deadly Soviet enemy. I was glad and proud that we did so. And I understand that what then was at risk was American security.

With the Cold War over, we must realize as we did for most of our history, that we simply do not know enough about remote reaches of the world to send American troops or support the involvement of other forces (like the U.N.). If we do, the result almost surely will be more of our own dead and of dead among those whom we wanted to help.

And help is what we wanted to bring Somalia. As an African-American, in fact, I cheered the dispatch of our troops to secure the port and the capital and countryside so that food could be distributed to the starving Somalians. I was particularly proud to see young African-

American men and women doing something so honorable and constructive with their lives, as opposed to falling prey to the many vices of our inner cities. For most, this will be the most fulfilling experience of their young lives — a unique opportunity to see the land of their ancestors while serving their home, the U.S.A. I had been irritated, as had others, that our government seemed obsessed with the tragedy in white Bosnia while blind to that in black Somalia. Our mission to Somalia was not conceived in evil. Nor was it executed with anything but the kind of professionalism that makes Americans proud of our military.

The problem was that our mission was in ignorance, unavoidable ignorance. Our government did not — and could not — know enough about Somalia to intervene effectively. I do not pretend to know enough. But it is clear to me that we are bound to make tragic mistakes when we land our troops far from our shores, pick sides, favor one violent warlord over another, attempt to mediate internal politics whose dynamic stretches back centuries, and pretend to know enough to separate the good guys from the bad.

In retrospect the U.S. military mission to Somalia was a serious mistake. It was, first of all, a mistake because African civilians suffer enough violence as it is, struggling every day to live with some dignity under what may be the world's harshest conditions, without the U.S. and U.N. adding to the violence and killing. And it was a mistake because we took lives and risked lives when no American interest was at stake. Let's not make these kinds of mistakes again. If we want to help Africans and others overseas, we must do so without killing them in the process.

The world looks to America for moral leadership. Consequently, we have a moral obligation to promote the values that have made us the moral beacon of the world; but our first obligation is to advance these values directly for the sake of our own citizenry. American lives should be committed stingily. Considering that the Soviet Union has collapsed, our foreign military entanglements must be directly connected to the National Security of our country. In Somalia, this was not the case.

Niger Innis is the Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality and

a leading Advisory Committee member of Project 21, an initiative of The National Center for

Public Policy Research to find and promote new leaders in America's communities.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I am greatly offended by the Pioneer Citizen Bank advertisement which appeared in the July 29, 1993 edition of the Sentinel-Voice. An ad which features a huge picture of a primate as its focal point in an effort to solicit business from the black community is insensitive and insulting. Unfortunately, these are invidious times we face in our society. Sadly, I have far too often heard and seen in print the words ape, monkey and baboon used as racial slurs.

That such an ad was approved by the Pioneer Citizen Bank and marketed in a black publication is unforgiving. That such an ad was approved and printed by the editor and publisher of the Sentinel-Voice is a slap in the face to our community. It is obvious that the only color of importance here is GREEN.

Loretta Holloway

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Dear Mr. Brown:

I am in receipt of a copy of the letter sent to you by Loretta Holloway, which recites great offense at the use of our current ad campaign in the Sentinel Voice.

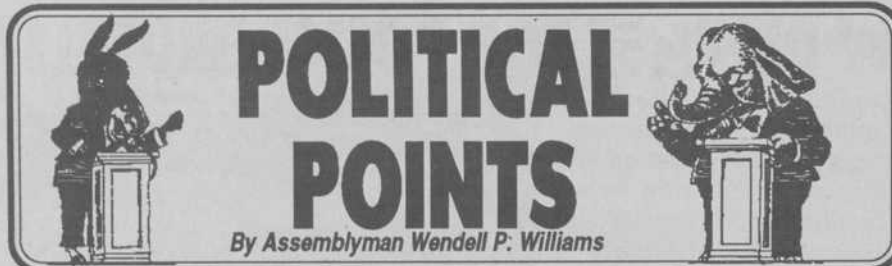
Even though Pioneer Citizens bank has been in existence for twenty-eight years, we are one of Nevada's smaller banks and in 1991 suffered from a lack of name recognition. In response to this deficiency, we

purchased a very high impact ad campaign which utilizes various animals (including a parrot, a hamster and an ostrich) whose antics poke fun at our much larger competitors. The star of the series is a comical orangutan who displays great distress over his "current" banking relationship. The campaign has been so successful that we have extended it to print advertising in both Reno and Las Vegas in newspapers, billboards, T-shirts, mailers and in-bank promotions.

Let me please assure anyone who might take even the slightest offense from this ad that at no time did we ever even remotely consider it has having any type of racial overtones. Certainly it was most emphatically not intended to reflect insensitivity or an insulting attitude on our part. I concur with Ms. Holloway that it is a sad commentary on our times that something created as a good faith effort to gain positive attention could be twisted and interpreted as some horrid racial slur.

The ad will not again be placed in the Sentinel Voice and I offer on behalf of Pioneer citizens and myself our most sincere apology to Ms. Holloway and your entire community of readers for any perceived offense.

Sincerely,  
William E. Martin  
President/CEO



## MARCHING ON THE HILL

Even though their parents were only in Jr. High School at the time, and of course they themselves were not even thought of at the time, you wouldn't know it if you looked at the excitement and enthusiasm in their faces. I'm talking about the young people in our community that are of members of the Martin Luther King Youth Committee who are raising money and finalizing plans to travel to Wash-

ington D.C. on August 26th to participate in 30th Anniversary of the March on Washington and the Sixth Annual "I Have A Dream" National Assembly.

The National Youth Assembly will consist of young people throughout America coming together for four days to learn about Dr. King's dream of peace and justice and prepare them to effectively deal with today's society and to use nonviolence in the resolution of conflict. Also

the Youth Assembly will allow young people to understand how Dr. King's teachings on nonviolence can be used to resolve the problems they face in their families, communities and world. And the best part about it is that for the first time, young people from Las Vegas will be there.

The 30th Anniversary march on Washington is dedicated to a new generation of young leaders. We pass the torch of leadership to our youth, as they too,



Assemblyman  
Wendell P. Williams

join as full partners in the March for jobs, justice and peace.

In 1987 a seed from the ideas and dream of Dr. Martin Luther King was planted that bore the fruit of the 1st Annual Youth Assembly. Now, six years later we are gathering in Washington D.C. to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the 1963 March. And the best part is that Las Vegas children will be there too.

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