

TO BE EQUAL

THREE STRIKES AND OUT

By John E. Jacob

In baseball, when a batter gets three strikes, he's out. Real life is a lot more complicated, which is why the national drive to imprison three-time criminal offenders for life won't work.

It won't curb crime, but it will lead to an orgy of prison building and to massive injustices.

But the three-strikes-and-out steamroller seems unstoppable. Even the President, who should know better, supported it as a feature of federal anti-crime legislation. And many governors are trying to impose it in their own states.

It is a response to the popular fear of violent crime and to frustration that all the tough crime laws passed in recent years haven't curbed crime.

But the three-strikes formula is just that — a formula. And mechanistic, artificial formulas never work in human affairs.

One problem with it is: what is a felony?

That's a critical question if you're changing the law to automatically imprison people convicted of three felonies for life.

For some heinous crimes, such as murder, rape, and kidnapping, the three strike rule may not be needed since cur-

rent law provides for long prison terms.

For others — the ones that most concern the average person, such as mugging, and drug dealing — life sentences are of doubtful effectiveness since such crimes are mostly committed by young people while they are young.

Removing them from society for a lengthy period of time is defensible. But a life term isn't. Stiff penalties for offenders would ensure that such individuals are of the streets during the period of their active crime careers.

And by definition, younger offenders are those most amenable to changing and to rehabilitation efforts.

Looking down the road, I predict the three-strikes-and-out movement will lead to taxpayer backlash.

Once the prisons become clogged and scarce resources are poured into building new prisons to accommodate the huge influx of prisoners created by laws mandating life imprisonment and longer terms, Americans will recognize the monster they've created in their panic about crime.

In opposing fixes like mandatory life terms, I'm not ignor-

ing punishment's role in curbing crime nor the need for action to increase people's security.

Nor do I romanticize criminal elements who prey upon their communities. African-Americans suffer most from violent crime, both on a personal basis and on an economic basis, since fear of crime acts as a deterrent to job-creating businesses in our communities.

But because I am very serious about the need to curb crime, I want to see us adopt realistic

measures, not easy solutions that won't work.

I suspect the President understands that, because while he backed three-strikes-and-out, he also spoke very eloquently about the need for community policing, expanded drug treatment programs, gun control, values, and jobs.

Tinkering with sentencing laws just helps people kid themselves about crime.

It's a lot tougher to organize communities to enforce solid

values, to keep young people straight, to make school performance important to youngsters, to keep drugs out of our neighborhoods and to help people who are hooked on drugs to get off them.

Doing those and the other hard things necessary to curb crime and violence will take individual activism by the "good" citizens of the community. And it will take investments by government on a scale sufficient to support efforts and make a dif-



JOHN E. JACOB

ference — investments a lot wiser those earmarked for over-stocked prisons.

NATIONAL ALLIANCE AGAINST RACIST & POLITICAL REPRESSION

NAARPR REPORT

By Charlene Mitchell, Co-Chairperson, NAARPR

The nation's conscience was jolted October 22 when Washington, D.C. Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly appealed to President Clinton to send National Guard troops to the nation's capitol to curb crime. After all, the appeal was a result of the federal government's continuing refusal to honor the promissory note to the nation's people that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called for some 30 years ago.

During those three decades many cities in the United States

have been literally under siege because of continuing neglect of the nation's social ills. It is so horrendous that drugs, combined with guns, resulting in homicides have become the nation's leading killer in our inner cities.

If one looks at the cities facing the most severe problems - New York City; Chicago; Washington, D.C.; Detroit; Los Angeles - it is crystal clear that these are cities whose residents suffer the worst unemployment, the most cuts in social programs, and highest local taxes due to federal tax cuts to the wealthy.

Yet the politicians' invariable response is to take the bat and club to those who suffer the most. They then call for more police and the increased use of the death penalty as provided in President Bill Clinton's proposed crime bill.

Irrespective on how one reacts to the need for more security and safety, the use of the bat obscures the real nature of the problem. It covers up a sore that will appear as soon as the National Guard disappears.

One only has to look at the rebellion and it's aftermath "South Central Los Angeles following the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King. The presence of the National Guard did not solve that community's problems. The social ills not only remain, but have worsened. The calls to rebuild Los Angeles have continued to fall on deaf ears because it is not government policy to help solve these problems - witness the fact that Watts has still not been rebuilt from the rebellion in the 1960's.

If Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly is truly to address the problems in the city, she ought to demand of

President Clinton that he provide immediate federal aid for rehabilitating housing and hiring the unemployed to rebuild the city's infrastructure, and make Washington, D.C. livable again for all it's residents. Demand of President Clinton that he provide emergency funds to keep the schools and after school programs open, and that the federal government help provide funds for city police to guard housing projects. John Jacob of the National Urban League has called such an approach an Urban Marshall Plan. It just makes good common sense and makes good on the promissory (See NAARPR Report, Pg 22)

NLV...THE WESTSIDE STORY ONE MONTH

By R.K. Brown

As February rolls around, we all should give honor and much thanks to the many ancestors who gave their lives for the cause of black advancement. Black history month is the time for all black Americans to reflect upon our tremendous and unmatched legacy.

As I have often said, black Americans are unique among the black world population. The odds would have you believe that black America would be the least advanced group in the black world. All black communities around the globe are oppressed by racist white imperialism like in America. But in other places at least blacks are in the majority.

You tell me how a couple million blacks made millions and millions of WELL ARMED racist whites, give us basic rights? We didn't even have guns for the most part. Today, in modern Africa, hundreds of millions of African people are controlled by just a few whites. In black America we are a minority, but we affect the majority.

Black and proud means to make it when you should not

survive. For that reason and many others, we continue to establish unprecedented achievements across the full spectrum of the American professional arena. Here's to all the teachers, programs, specials, and community events which will be dedicated to this month. You educators are the keys who unlock the world of black essence to young people.

This gets me back to the most troubling thing about black history month. In one month we have to tell the whole history of the black man. In every school across the country, the U.S. tries to cram an unending supply of achievement into one month.

Since African people were the first humans, then quite logi-

cally we would have the longest history to narrate! Simple reasoning then would signal to anyone that we would need the most time to tell our story, not the least. Since the first known recorded history is African history, then we should have 11 months, and European history should be just one month.

This is the kind of institutionalized discrimination which continues to be an everlasting part of America. I had a white person tell me that progress has been made since I don't have to sit on the back of the bus. Or I can eat in a public place. What a joke. Millions of people died, and all we got were basic rights from the deal.

(See Westside, Story Pg 22)

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Commemorative Scholarship Foundation PRESENTS Esther Rolle in "BETHUNE". The Louis Jordan Commemorative Scholarship Foundation, a non-profit organization, will sponsor it's First Fundraiser to the Las Vegas Community. Includes photo of Esther Rolle and production details.