

# 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

## CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

# HUMAN RIGHTS, AFRICA AND US

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans have died over the past few months as the rest of the world looked on, seemingly paralyzed and unable to stop the slaughter. Bodies have washed up on shores in neighboring countries. Hundreds of thousands have fled for their lives, becoming refugees in countries little prepared and unable to finance the costs of receiving them. The sad reality is that the civil war in Rwanda has been going on for decades, receiving little of the world's attention until now. Similarly, the political situation in Somalia was an old conflict which continued to worsen until tens of thousands were dying of starvation and the world was confronted with the pictures of thousands of dying children. Only then did the United Nations and the United States intervene in the internal conflict of that nation.

Now, a similar situation ex-

ists in another part of Africa. Liberia has long and close historical ties to the United States. Indeed, Liberia was founded in 1847 by freed American slaves, who chose to return to Africa rather than stay in the country which enslaved them. The capital city, Monrovia, was named for U.S. President James Monroe. Its official language is English and it uses Liberian dollars, which are actually old U.S. dollars as its currency. For many years rubber was Liberia's largest cash crop and it had strong ties to U.S. rubber companies, especially Firestone.

Liberia has faced political instability for nearly two decades, but this has escalated over the past four years as a civil war continues to be fought and wide-ranging human rights violations and abuses continue to be committed by the various parties of the conflict. Indeed, since 1990, Liberia has been a divided country with one armed force

controlling Monrovia and several other factions controlling much of the rest of the country.

Human rights violations have been a part of the continuous and bloody civil war. In late 1992, five American nuns and four novices were killed, drawing much international attention and finally forcing the United Nations to take action in the form of an international arms embargo. During this time, several cease-fires and peace agreements have been signed, only to falter once the warring parties left the peace table. Moreover, the military intervention sponsored by other west African countries and originally hailed by the rest of the world has yet to bring peace to Liberia and this military force, mainly staffed by Nigerians, is now accused of aligning itself with two of the warring factions and perhaps even supplying arms and ammunition to them.

Human rights groups remain

concerned about the status of human rights in Liberia and President Jimmy Carter's Center has had an office in Monrovia for the past two years. The Carter Center is monitoring the situation closely, as are the other human rights organizations.

In the meantime, although little is heard outside of Liberia about the human rights violations, they are still common there. This spring Human Rights Watch Africa released a new study on human rights abuses in Liberia, citing recent military campaigns against civilians, some 40,000 of whom have been displaced because of the fighting. Indeed, Human Rights Watch Africa's report labels the situation in Liberia as "very precarious," pointing out that only a small percentage of the combatants have been demobilized and there are increasing reports of widespread looting, arbitrary arrests and detention, forcible recruitment, beatings, torture,

rape and killings of civilians.

Meanwhile, there has been extremely slow progress toward the achievement of free elections, which are now scheduled for this September. President Carter plans to head a delegation of election observers if the elections are held. Liberia last held national elections in 1985 and although the voting process itself was judged to be free, the counting process was thought to be manipulated by then-President Samuel Doe. Doe was later overthrown and killed.

All Americans, but especially African Americans, have a special relationship with Liberia.

With that relationship — a responsibility to speak out against the human violations in Liberia, a responsibility to work for free and fair elections in that war-torn country. We must urge the United Nations to stay closely involved in Liberia and urge our own government to be proactive in Liberia. According to Human Rights Watch Africa, the specter of Liberia degenerating into a Somalia-like situation is a real possibility. We cannot afford to wait for another Somalia or another Rwanda before our government acts. Liberia is a part of us, just as we are a part of it.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEAR EDITOR

According to a recent article from Carson City, eleven hundred letters were mailed to Nevada drivers to determine if they are obeying the state's mandatory insurance law. What the article failed to state is the penalty for what is considered non-compliance. Here's how it works.

First, the State of Nevada DMV officials cross-reference insurance information now available from major insurance companies and tied in to DMV computers. They then note any date when insurance has lapsed and that date is used on the questionnaire you receive.


When you answer the questionnaire, the officials in Carson City then send out a notice that your registration has been re-

voked and that you have a number of days to obtain evidence of insurability with SR22 status.

The days left for compliance could be only one, or if you have been on vacation, none. SR22 status means that you will now be relegated to a rated insurance status and will be required to pay approximately double for all auto insurance you buy for the next three years (for the entire family). SR22 is issued to drivers convicted of driving under the influence and those without insurance (for any length of time) indiscriminately.


If you think this is a law developed to line the pockets of the insurance industry, as I do, write your congressman today.

S.D. Beevers  
Las Vegas, NV.



## POLITICAL POINTS

By Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams



## GET TO THE REAL

I'll never forget the anger and disbelief that filled the voices of outraged and saddened parents who called me after the Dr. Martin Luther King Birthday Parade a few years ago after their sons were lined up against a wall downtown and photographed by police officers. They were not charged or warned about anything, just photographed.

I later found out that this little candid camera process was done quite often and in many places. Many of these young men later found out that they were listed and filed as gang members or suspected gang members. However, what is even more frightening about this little game is the fact that the 1991 state legislature here in Ne-

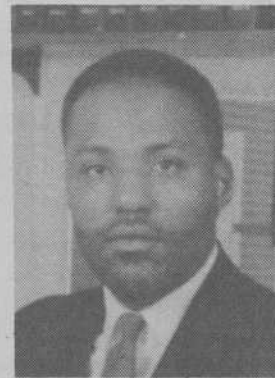
vada enacted an enhancement law for gang and suspected gang members. Therefore, landing in gang files without committing a crime could put one in a fix beyond belief.

But in case you missed it, the Reno, Nevada Police Department was recently sued because they kept files on individuals who were only suspected of being gang members.

The federal class action suit was filed by a 19-year-old community college student charging that he and other young people were not gang members, were stopped and treated like violent criminals. Rather than fighting the lawsuit, the city of Reno agreed to a lawsuit settlement that mandates that a police officer will have to document reasons for believing that a youth is

participating in gang activity. Also, under the settlement the police department will have to advise in writing to contact the police department to find out if they are being included in the gang file. They also will be providing the names and badge numbers of officers who detain them.

With the political campaign season jumping in full swing, issues like this and others need to be explored and discussed now with those running for the position of sheriff, and not after the elections are over. Having the right to vote means more than just being able to physically cast a vote. Moreover its the actual participation in the entire process - year round. It should not be about which candidates platform we will choose, but



Assemblyman  
Wendell P. Williams

rather which candidate's viewpoint is closer to your platform and ideas and ideals. Refrain from going to forums and candidates nites to hear what the candidates have to say, but instead go to let them know your viewpoint and find out if yours and theirs are parallel, and to what degree.

Gang files is just one small issue among the very many. But as small as some may be, they can sometimes cause changes in your life that may never be the same. Get off the couch, politics is not a spectator sport. Look past the hoopla and banners and sexy slogans and get to the real meat.

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