

Point of View

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CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

IMAGES, VIOLENCE AND YOUTH

By Bernice Powell Jackson

The hero drives an expensive car and brandishes a gun. Perhaps he implies that he sells drugs and he calls women "hoes and bitches." He's a gangsta rap video star and he's listened to by millions of children and young people.

Day after day we see stories of the violence engulfing our cities. Some of us even live those stories. Violence is destroying a whole generation of your people. Violence is enslaving not only those young people who are the victims or the killers, but those who are afraid to leave their homes after dark and even mothers who are said to put their babies to sleep in bathtubs in the hope that stray bullets cannot reach them.

Violence is enslaving those who live miles away in suburban communities remote from the inner cities of America. Because the reality is that children in suburban communities are caught up in the fervor of violence as well. Because the reality is that more and more tax dollars are being used to incarcerate the perpetrators of violence and to pay the astronomical health costs of many of its victims. The reality is that every American is enslaved by violence in some way and we'd all better get busy doing something about it.

Several African American women in Congress are doing just that — they are getting busy and doing something about the violence and negative images found in gangsta rap music. In

the process they are taking on the multi-billion dollar entertainment industry and beginning an important public debate.

Both Congresswoman Cardiss Collins and Senator Carol Moseley-Braun have sponsored hearings on violent and demeaning images found in popular music today. Not surprisingly, they found that many music videos depict violence and crime. Not surprisingly, they found that many are demeaning to women. Not surprisingly, they found that the addiction to violence found in all of American society is a part of rap music culture as well. "We are a society infatuated with violence in a clinically obsessive way," testified a representative of the American Psychiatric Association. Not surprisingly,

they found that there is a relationship between exposure to violence and childhood development.

A symposium held recently by Congressman Tom Lantos of California on violence and video games heard many of the same kinds of testimonies. Indeed, those middle-class suburban parents who think their children are escaping the violence need only to look at some of the video games their children play. Games where women are hunted and hung on meat hooks. Games where captives are beheaded or have their hearts ripped out.

Both the hearings on violence and gangsta rap and those on violence and video games have focussed attention on the enter-

tainment business and the epidemic of violence this nation is suffering. It is estimated that the video game industry earns \$10 billion a year worldwide and that hip hop music, including gangsta rap, generates nearly \$1 billion, or close to 10 percent of the total U.S. music market every year. Without counting the movie industry or the television industry's revenues from movies featuring violence, violence is big business in America.

Thankfully, some of those in the record industry and video game industry also are concerned and there are efforts

underway to develop ratings systems for video games and rap music. Already some radio stations across the country, many of them African American-owned, have refused to play gangsta rap music. But some critics question how vigilant a self-imposed rating system really will be.

Thankfully, some are beginning to talk with parents to try to make them more aware of the content of the music their children listen to constantly or of the video games they play everyday. But far too many parents remain ignorant of or just don't

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter in response to the letter from Doris Siet printed in the July 7, 1994 edition of the Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice. I believe all people have the right to their opinions whether they be positive or negative. The letter struck a vile cord with me. Doris Siet complains that KCEP and EOB have not complied with their promise to remove Gangster Rap from their format, and that some blacks do not wish to be "Funkdafied, and refereed to as hoers." This may be so, but it seems to me that if this is not the type of music you wish to listen to personally, all you have to do is switch to another radio station. Also, as far as ratings and financial support, they must be doing O.K., because I've been listening to the station for as long as I can remember. KCEP is

one station that plays the best mixes i.e Rap, R&B, Soul, Blues, Jazz, and I emphasize on plays and not overplays. KCEP offers more of a variety than any other station in Las Vegas and if that's not catering to the listeners different tastes, then maybe you can explain this to me and all the other listeners in another letter to the editor. As for your comment "Why shouldn't we as African Americans be able to make a choice not based on race, but on quality?" KCEP has given every one the choice of what they want to hear, and if what you want to hear is not included in their format, once again, find another station that you feel, suits your listening needs. As for your comment "Not all African Americans are low-income non-professionals." That is the thing you said in your letter that is true, but

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POLITICAL POINTS

By Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams



CRIME BUSTERS '94

Tough - Tough - Tough. I said I'm Tough - Tough - Tough on crime. These words rattle like window shutters in a cyclone out of the mouths of too many candidates during the "do anything or say anything to get elected season." It seems as if they put out an APB on Willie Horton to help them get elected. Its really getting sickening. And the most sickening aspect of this madness is when they play the crime game with the race card as their Ace.

Yes, everyone is concerned about crime, but tough-on-crime campaign talk is directed only at symptoms such as crime. Most crime is only the result of other problems of society that are unaddressed and ignored.

From local and state politics, to the U.S. Congress, the crime issue is played like a Game Boy by those that are expected by the people to fight problems and not symptoms of problems.

The crime bill that is being

considered now in Congress has given some members of Congress a political football that is so sweet to them that some think that they're playing in a Super Bowl. many are even more delighted because with all this excitement, they now find that they have a racial card to now play.

The \$30 billion dollar crime bill has already passed the House in the form of a version that includes the Racial Justice Act. The Racial Justice Act would basically allow death penalty defendants introduce statistics in court to try to prove racial bias. This is a provision that is very strongly supported by the thirty-eight member Congressional Black Caucus.

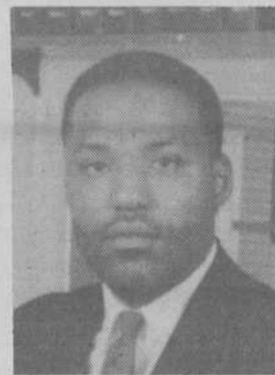
The Clinton Administration has also given its support to the caucus for the racial provisions. Now that support from the administration is as lifeless as a string of dead fish, it seems as if the administration would rather pass anything with the word crime written on it, regardless of what's in it.

Last week in his weekly radio address, President Clinton pressed to pass the bill with or without the Racial Justice Act. Also last week, Clinton's chief of staff, Leon Panetta, called Congressional Black Caucus chairman Kweisi Mfume to inform him that the Clinton Administration was abandoning its support to help the caucus get the Racial Justice Act included in the bill.

It looks like Clinton has gotten as frightened as Macbeth before the ghost of Banquo, mainly because Senate Judiciary Committee chairman, Joseph Biden, has already confirmed that there are not enough votes on his committee to pass any form of provision that addresses racial justice.

Remember now, every single statistic in every state in America shows that there is racial injustice throughout the criminal justice system. Remember also, that logic has no place in a political football game. Just play to the fans and who cares who else gets hurt.

Now don't just think that this



Assemblyman
Wendell P. Williams

is an attempt to protect criminals, because its not. Rather an attempt to help a comatose constitution come to life.

Find me any record, from any state, since or before Jamestown in 1619 or any colony before 1776 where a white man was executed for killing an African American, and I will personally lobby our representatives from Nevada to vote against the Racial Justice Act. But I also know that there is no record of not one single case. This alone should validate including the provision.

So as the campaign season heats up, challenge those candidates that try to get elected playing the race card. When politicians play the race card, it should be done from the top of the deck and nothing down.

Otherwise it is better to stay out of the game; too many lives are in the pot.

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