

POINT OF VIEW

TO BE EQUAL

Restore the trust and respect

By Hugh B. Price
President

National Urban League

The National Urban League calls upon President Clinton to lead a national campaign to restore trust and respect between the nation's police and the minority citizens they are sworn to serve. Racial tensions have been rising across the country in the wake of controversial police actions

which resulted in the deaths of two black men in St. Petersburg, FL and Pittsburgh, PA respectively.

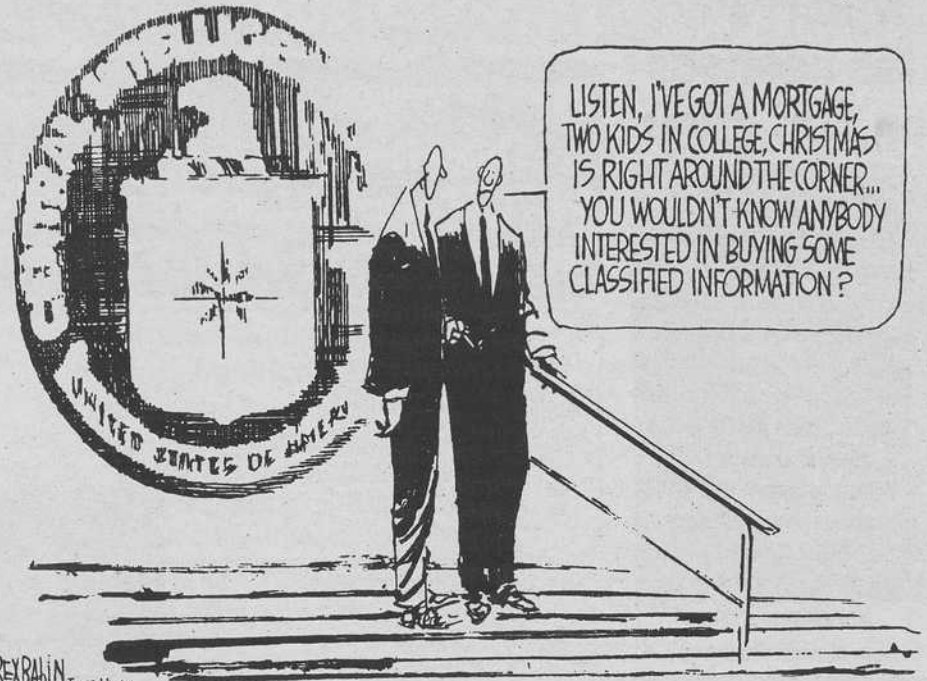
Black anger boiled over earlier this fall in St. Petersburg, FL where a black motorist who was stopped for speeding was shot to death by a white police officer — and again earlier this month when a grand jury opted not to indict the officer on any charge.



HUGH B. PRICE

And in Pittsburgh, the decision of an all-white grand jury to not indict on involuntary manslaughter charges a white suburban Pittsburgh policeman in connection with the death of African-American motorist Jonny E. Gammage stunned many there, and elsewhere.

Local police officers are the front-line of contact between government and citizens. Mutual respect for police officers' obligations and citizen's rights makes for reasonably harmonious and safe communities. Tensions between officers and those they've sworn



REY RUBIN
TIMES UNION

to protect undermine both.

These and other similar controversies are dramatic evidence of a crisis in urban law enforcement which threatens the domestic peace. It is a crisis which demands Presidential leadership. We urge the President to utilize his bully pulpit and unparalleled convening power to remedy what's wrong in police/community relations and to begin the process of reconciliation.

Mr. Clinton has effectively used these techniques to address the issues of tobacco usage among young people and violence in television. Now is the time to deploy these presidential powers to defuse the ticking time bomb in urban America.

These — and many other — incidents in which police appear to have abused the rights of African-Americans whom they stopped for allegedly committing rival offenses raise issues of the greatest seriousness. These incidents haven't just happened to supposedly suspicious characters or "bad actors" with lengthy arrest records. All too often, they've involved ordinary citizens whose worst offense — assuming there's any offense whatsoever — is a traffic infraction.

Word of these encounters has spread like wildfire on the streets of Black America, and produced a dangerous cynicism and hostility about gross police misconduct that the larger society ignores at the peril of all of us.

Many urban police chiefs acknowledge the growing polarization between the police and minority communities. In fact, Lee Brown, the former federal drug czar and police commissioner in New York City, brought police chiefs and African-American leaders together at Rice University in September to launch a dialogue on how to deal with the problem.

A summit on the issue, led by the nation's Commander-in-Chief, would give this crisis the

positive visibility it needs. We believe that those invited should include a cross-section of police chiefs, heads of police commissions and police unions, and civil rights and community leaders.

The primary purpose would be for the President to, first, proclaim this as a priority national problem which he intends to focus on until it is ameliorated, and, secondly, enlist those assembled in a concerted effort to solve it.

A next step could be for the President to create a national commission to gather testimony, evidence and findings from relevant investigations, civilian complaint proceedings and major controversies of recent years which involve apparent or proven police abuse of citizen's rights, as well as needless yet dangerous escalation of police/civilian encounters; and determine whether there are recurring patterns of abuse.

That could lead to the commission crafting a model code of police conduct, consistent with the U.S. Constitution, which would guide officer's behavior all along the continuum of encounters with citizens, from routine patrol, handling of minor infractions and investigation, to so-called "hot pursuit," detention for questioning, custody, arrest and formal prosecution.

This model code would not usurp local police functions, or have the federal government looking over their shoulders as

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CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

In memory of the children

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Two heart-wrenching stories, 500 miles apart. Different stories, but the same outcome. Different mothers and children and the same pathos. It's hard, really, to find words to convey the sadness which attends both of these stories, however little we will ever know of them.



Bernice Powell Jackson

In October, the color picture of the family was on the front page of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. A handsome African-American family: the mother, her five and two-year-old sons and twin 14 month-old daughters. The mother and all but the five-year-old were found dead in their rented house in Lorain, outside of Cleveland. All of those who were dead had been shot and the five-year-old was in critical condition from smoke inhalation. The family had been found when firefighters responded to the fire which was raging in the front of the house.

At first it seemed unclear what had happened to that family. Why was the five-year-old not shot? Had someone come into their home, even though all the doors and windows were locked? How had the fire started and was it to cover up the deaths?

It seems now that the mother, 31-year-old Tina Jackson, shot her own children, then set fire to the house and then, finally, shot herself with a stolen semi-automatic handgun. The gun powder found on the mother's hand and the testimony of the recovering child that no one else was in the house make the unthinkable seem thinkable.

What happened to force this mother whom others say was devoted to her children to kill them? Tina Jackson and her family were scheduled to be evicted from their home that day, but they had secured other housing nearby. She was a single mother and her children all had different fathers, but at least one father had supervised visits with his son and carried him on his health insurance policy. He was the son who survived this horrible ideal and who is now living with his father. And why didn't Tina Jackson shoot him as well?

The firefighters who found the family, most of whom are fathers themselves, had to undergo counseling. They brought presents to the hospital to the recovering child. They will carry with them always the vision of a family destroyed for reasons we'll probably never know.

And now, the story of a mother in the Bronx who threw her three children, seven-year-old twins and a two-year-old, off a 14-story building and then jumped herself. The 23-year-old mother, Chicqua Reveal, and one twin are dead. The other children are in very critical condition.

Another mystery of why a mother would be so desperate that she would try to kill her children and then end her own life. Her friends say she was a good mother, who did not use drugs and who dressed her children for school. A single mother and a foster child herself, she had recently allowed her own mother, just released from prison, to come and live with her family. This new arrangement did not seem to be working out well. But was murder and suicide the only solution she thought possible?

Laurence Bates, Sr., the father of the surviving son in Ohio said that he hoped for a normal childhood for his son now, one of falling off bikes and going to school like all the rest of the children. I pray for that future for Laurence Jr. as well. And for the Reveal children in New York. And I weep for those mothers who felt they had no where to turn and, thus, turned on themselves and their families.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Scientific advances in medicine have made it possible for man to play God, and there is painful evidence that man isn't very good at it.

Witness the heart-tugging disagreements within the United Network for Organ Sharing, the private group that decides who gets priority for receiving, say, a liver transplant.

This group has long held to the policy that the inadequate number of livers available for transplants should be rationed out, with priority going to the sickest people closest to death. But the group decided at its annual meeting in Boston to make a profound policy change: priority will now go to a small number of "acute" patients deemed "most likely to benefit" from a liver transplant.

While we don't know all the delicate implications of this policy change, it is clear that a lot of doctors will have to tell woefully ill patients that they won't get desperately needed new livers.

Among those doomed by this policy change are patients with chronic liver problems — that is, genetic liver disease, livers damaged by heavy consumption of alcohol, or viral hepatitis, which may be caused by injecting drugs with dirty needles. No matter how close to death, people in this group will no longer have the same priority as someone who suddenly develops a liver crisis by eating poisonous mushrooms, or develops an acute illness that threatens them with imminent death.

Members of the United Network for Organ Sharing insist that they are not making moral judgments against alcohol drinkers or drug users, but the clear implication is that boozers and druggies are less likely to benefit from a new liver than are people who live "cleaner" lives.

When the Network decides which ill person is most likely to benefit from receiving a scarce organ, can it avoid judgments about which allocation would do the most for society? Might it not be better to grant a new liver to a young scholar with an alcohol problem who is doing promising research on cancer than to give that organ to an abstemious young man who "only teaches English?" Or would that be reprehensible judgment?

We must insist that the Department of Health and Human Services monitor this new policy closely, to see that it is implemented with bone-clean fairness. In the meantime, we all need to join in a campaign to ensure that more donors give more kidneys, livers and the other organs that are so much in demand so that this Network for Organ Sharing can do less God-playing.

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