

# POINT OF VIEW

## TO BE EQUAL

### A "profile" — or a stereotype

By Lee Daniels  
(Guest columnist)  
Editorial Director  
National Urban League

It was over so quickly, and the state trooper was so polite, I almost didn't resent what had happened.

What had happened was that while driving from New York to Boston several years ago I was "racially profiled" — that is, stopped because I fit a law enforcement agency's "profile"

of a likely drug courier: a young black man driving a rented car. Or rather, the state trooper who stopped me thought I was young.

He had asked for my license and gone to his car; then, returning quickly and handing my license back to me, had crouched down by my door and explained:

"I'm sorry for the stop. We're on the lookout for people who're ferrying drugs from New York to Boston. So, we're looking for

young black men driving rented cars with New York plates."

Then, noting with some amazement that I was, not twenty-something, but in my early 40s, he added, "You're much older than you look." He wished me safe travel and then took off.

A minor incident, you say? Absolutely. And painless, too.

But suppose I had been twenty-something, as, of course, I once had been? Would that have brought another state trooper to the scene as "backup" so that this one could search the rented car? How would I have felt then, standing by the side of the road and watching the cars whiz by as their occupants looked at state troopers searching my car? Would it have



been more "painful" then?

And would it have led to something more serious than a momentary, infuriating embarrassment? After all, there have been numerous incidents during the past decade in which unarmed black men have been

killed by white police officers after being stopped for seemingly routine, alleged traffic violations. The October, 1995 death of Jonny Gamage, Jr. on an interstate highway outside Pittsburgh, PA while in the custody of five white policemen, and the shooting death of Tyrone Lewis in St. Petersburg, FL two months ago are just the latest incidents to prompt a very old question: Why are traffic stops by white police officers so fraught with peril for black motorists?

That question helps to explain the growing concern about the apparently common practice of state police departments stopping black motorists traveling along certain highways in order to search their cars for drugs.

Are these stops being made on the basis of a "profile" — or a stereotype?

The belief that it could be the latter led to a January, 1995 settlement in federal district court in Baltimore under which the Maryland State Police agreed not to use race in deciding what cars to search. An African-American attorney and the American Civil Liberties Union had sued the state police, charging that the attorney and his family had been stopped and their car searched by a Maryland state trooper while driving on Interstate 95 only because they were black.

The ACLU recently has gone back to court for a contempt order against state police because the research it compiled

on traffic stops state troopers made from January, 1995 to September, 1996 show an astounding racial difference in which motorists traveling I-95 get stopped: Three of every four motorists stopped and searched by state police were black, even though blacks make up less than 18 percent of motorists committing traffic violations along that route. Only one of every five motorists detained and searched by state police was white, although 75 percent of the motorists committing traffic violations were white. Troopers patrolling I-95 detained and searched black motorists at more than twice the rate of troopers patrolling other Maryland roadways. More than 70 percent of the searches of all I-95 motorists' cars were fruitless.

Finally, statistics show that on all Maryland roads, black and white motorists are found with drugs at basically equal rates — between 28 and 29 percent.

For their part, the state police, while claiming that the racial disparity in the traffic stops being made along the highway have sharply declined recently, have also said that the disparity is due to drug traffickers — who they say are most likely African-American — using the highway to ferry drugs to the black neighborhoods of Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia.

But thus far the state police have presented no evidence — drugs seized from drug couriers — to support the notion that the

(See *Stereotype*, Page 16)

### CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

## Texaco, Avis, Shell, Circuit City et al

By Bernice Powell Jackson

Texaco is off the front pages of the newspapers and not on the television screens, but a closer reading or watching will tell other stories of corporate racism which have surfaced in the past few weeks. These stories show how institutional racism is still very much a part of corporate life in America as we near the 21st century.



Bernice Powell Jackson

Indeed, only days after Texaco went off the media radar screens, we learned that Avis car rentals in North and South Carolina discriminated against African-American customers and that the national Avis corporation probably knew about these racist practices. Now a federal jury has found that Circuit City has systematically discriminated against its African-American employees.

Corporate racism, then, is a coat of many colors. These include the corporation's employment practices, its service to its customers, its use of people of color vendors and franchisers, and its corporate social responsibility performance, not only in the United States, but around the world.

While recent headlines have focused on discrimination and racial hostility in the work place, it is important not to underestimate the importance of social responsibility accountability. For example, there is Shell Oil, which has been criticized for its support of South African apartheid regime during the 1970's and 80's and its current support of the Nigeria dictatorship, which is responsible for the repression of the Ogoni people, whose land supplies the oil. Texaco itself has been criticized for its role in developing oil and gas reserves in Burma, which is run by a repressive and illegitimate military dictatorship also notorious for human rights violations. The attitude and actions of multinational corporations toward so-called Third World nations, thus, must be considered a part of their track record.

While the media world seems to have put corporate racism on the media back burner, it is not off the agenda of the religious community, which has been challenging corporations like Texaco for 25 years. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), a coalition of 275 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish institutional investors with combined portfolios of over \$50 billion, is closely watching the follow-up to the Texaco settlement. ICCR-member agencies, for instance, are sponsoring shareholder resolutions on a variety of Texaco problems. They will call on Texaco to diversify its board of directors, to break down so-called "glass ceiling" barriers to the advancement of women and people of color and to make a detailed report on Texaco's diversity efforts.

"The recently revealed tapes only confirm what we have been hearing from employees and raising with Texaco management for years," said Gary Brouse, director of ICCR's Equality Issue Group. Now that Texaco has settled with its employees and committed itself to aggressively ferreting out racism throughout the company, what are Avis and Shell and Circuit City and other corporations going to do? And what are the rest of us going to do to let them know that racism is not acceptable — not now, not ever?

### Carl Rowan's Commentary

Howard Kurtz, the Washington Post's media critic, writes that I am "unfair" in describing Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern as hatemongers in my new book, "The Coming Race War in America."



CARL ROWAN

This Kurtz seems to wish upon me timidity, even cowardice, in writing about these titans of talk who are demagoguing America toward its greatest social crisis.

"Stern ... has made fun of blacks — along with Jews, Mexicans, Filipinos and other racial ethnic groups," Kurtz writes. "Some people can't stand this sort of satire."

I'll wage that in the 1930s, when the Nazis were stereotyping and scapegoating Jews, a lot of well-meaning Germans dismissed it as "satire." The "fun-making" in Germany quickly deteriorated into some of the worst atrocities in human history.

I can't believe that Kurtz would help Stern to hide behind the word "entertainment" in justifying his vulgar, utterly offensive broadcasts. I point out in my book that white Americans once painted their faces black and put on minstrel show "entertainment," but Americans stopped that in the knowledge that such "entertainment" wounded other citizens.

Kurtz says "so what?" to my citation of Limbaugh's splenetic, sexist assaults on the women's movement. He says Limbaugh "mercilessly skewers liberals, feminists, journalists and those he views as Hollywood elitist and environmental wackos ... But mostly his show is three hours a day of mainstream conservatism."

Yes, a conservatism that includes the mean-spirited delivery of piles of misinformation and surly innuendoes about the most divisive issues in American life. Kurtz doesn't seem to understand that the most effective hatemongers are those who are careful not to throw around "the n-word" or other blatant racial insults.

Kurtz concludes his news-pages "editorial" against me with the assertion that "Folks who don't like Limbaugh or Stern, who has been relentlessly penalized by the Federal Communications Commission, have a clear option: Turn them off."

Just turn them off?

When the Nazis were suffocating Jews in "satire," leaders in the Vatican just "tuned out." Government leaders in Great Britain and United States just turned them off, pretending not to hear anything about what Hitler's killers planned to do, or later, to know anything about the ghastly murders they were committing.

Kurtz writes that my book "misses the point of what (Limbaugh and Stern) do and why millions of loyal fans tune in each day." I write so critically of them because I know precisely what they do. And I written about "The Coming Race War..." because I am disturbed that their slick hatemongering has "millions of loyal fans."

© 1996 by King Features Syndicate

## LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice

Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.  
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.  
900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104  
Telephone (702) 380-8100 • Fax (702) 380-8102

Contributing Writers:  
Jackie Brantley  
Lee Brown  
Carl Chamberlain  
Ron Gibson  
Loretta Arrington Hall  
Barbara Robinson  
Diana Saffold  
Fred T. Snyder  
Photographers:  
Stacy Banks  
John Broussard  
Jonathan Olsen

Ramon Savoy, *Publisher-Editor*  
Lynnette Sawyer, *General Manager*  
Willis Brown, *Production Manager*  
Don Snook, *Graphics*  
Ed & Betty Brown, *Founders*

Subscriptions payable in advance  
Six months \$15.00 • Twelve months \$25.00  
The rates apply to Continental United States only  
Member:  
National Newspaper Publishers Association  
West Coast Black Publishers Association