

THE RAY WILLIS REPORT

The black holocaust

By Ray Willis
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Black folk have been hearing it for so long it has become deeply ingrained into our subconscious memory. What I'm referring to is the belief that anything dealing with Blackness won't get fair treatment. Consider the case of the Holocaust. When I say "Holocaust," what do you automatically think of? The JEWISH Holocaust, of course.

Make no mistake about it, the Jewish Holocaust was the most devastating loss of human life in history occurring in such a short span of time. But did you know that there was a separate, unrelated Holocaust of much greater proportion causing death and devastation to tens of millions of our African ancestors?

One reason not many people know much about the Black Holocaust is because it took place hundreds of years ago. The Jewish Holocaust occurred in recent history and is still fresh on many people's minds. The Jewish Holocaust, where more than seven million Jews were slaughtered in German concentration camps, is common knowledge. But how many people could tell you, or even know, that as many as 200 million Africans perished during the Black Holocaust?

Through films, photographs and personal accounts of survivors, the story of the Jewish Holocaust has immediacy and lives on. The Jews' domination of the movie industry and the media is one reason their Holocaust has gained even more widespread attention.

Not so for Blacks, who lack the clout necessary to have their story told with anywhere close to the same impact. And, quite frankly, who cares? Slavery is truly the White Man's Burden. He would like to forget it ever happened. But it did. And our story deserves to be told, the same as Jews or anyone else

who has such a compelling history.

Interestingly, Blacks and Jews view their respective Holocausts in a different way. Blacks do not like to dwell on the horrors of the Middle Passage or even discuss how bad conditions were during slavery. On the other hand, Jews think it is very important to "never forget" what happened to them.

Their survivors are available at a moment's notice to give a firsthand account of their appalling experiences at the hands of their captors. Holocaust memorabilia is very important in the Jewish tradition. Black people do not enjoy being reminded of our horrible past. Perhaps that's because of the lingering psychological effect of slavery.

During the era of the African Holocaust, film and videotape did not exist to provide a compelling picture of the horrors of slavery. All that exists today are slave diaries and ship's logs.

Imagine how powerful an anti-slavery tool it would be to have had film or videotape of scenes aboard a slave ship bound for America via the Middle Passage. Think how compelling it would be to be able to see slaves shackled together, bound tightly hand-to-foot in chains, packed so tightly together that they could not move an inch. To be in earshot of the guttural wails of anguish amplified to higher and higher decibels, reaching a crescendo as the human cargo wallowed helplessly in their own excrement. To see the menacing schools of vicious sharks trailing the ship all the way across the Atlantic, churning up a frothy white wake as they eagerly feasted on a steady diet of human flesh from slaves tossed overboard. If such a vivid authentic visual account existed it might just make our circumstance in America much easier to

comprehend.

Unfortunately, no such visual record exists. All we have are oral and written accounts, and an occasional artifact from a sunken slave ship.

In human terms, the real tragedy of African enslavement is the immeasurable psychological damage done to our people. The results are manifest in today's Black condition. It is similar to the mental damage resulting when a person is taken hostage for an extended period of time. Similar psychological scars permeate Black America.

Ironically, the famous Jewish film producer/director Steven Spielberg is making a movie, "Amistad," which tells the true story of a slave ship mutiny led by Cinque and 39 slaves in 1839. Isn't it ironic: a Jewish filmmaker, making two movies about Holocausts, one Black ("Amistad"), another Jewish ("Schindler's List"). From the Jewish Holocaust to the Black Holocaust, in one



RAY WILLIS

fell swoop.

There is no mistaking that the Black Holocaust is one of the most underreported tragedies in the history of the world. No, the Jewish Holocaust and the Black Holocaust are not the same. Each is unique. That's why I say now more than ever before, our story should be told—unfiltered, unedited, unexpurgated. The Jews have done an admirable job of making the world remember their Holocaust. Black people must also learn never to forget. As the saying goes, "If you don't know where you've been, you certainly don't know where you're going."

To know is to grow.

Business

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Brown Business Center to help it conduct consumer marketing studies and review its current marketing strategies with the goal of improving its business reach in African-American and other minority communities.

That includes Nissan's pledge to expand its use of business suppliers owned by white women and people of color. In addition, Nissan has also committed itself to expand the number of African-American and other minority-owned Nissan dealerships in America.

We in the Urban League movement know that efforts like these are part of what Ron Brown had in mind both in the years he spent with us and as he moved on the world stage. He knew that improving the lot of ordinary people can be a tremendous force for good.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

Changing the image of Jesus

By Bernice Powell Jackson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I am always amazed when people claim that racism is over and done with and that if people of color just work hard enough they will succeed in this country. I am always amazed because it seems that every week there is new evidence that racism is alive and well in America. Take the story of



Bernice Powell Jackson

the passion play in Union City, New Jersey.

After 82 years of the Park Theater Performing Arts Center's production of The Passion Play, this year the center chose an African American to alternate in the role of Jesus. That's when the uproar began.

Not only did the center find that people in this multiracial city were leaving profane messages and cancelling tickets, but the actor, Desi Arnaz Giles found himself facing death threats. "As soon as you're cast in something like this, you know it may stir some people," Giles said, "But death threats?"

It seems that the image of Jesus as a black man is so threatening to some that their reaction was to promise death to the performer. The irony is that Jesus was born in an area of the world in which most people are darker hued and that the blond, blue-eyed image of Jesus has only emerged within the past century or so. Indeed, many early Russian Orthodox icons of Mary and the infant Jesus portray them both with dark features.

But Giles found another interesting phenomenon as well. When he played Herod (a negative role) in last year's performance or when he played Lucifer in another production, there was no outcry. "I guess they can accept a black man in a negative role," said Giles.

It seems that once again racism gets in the way of reality. Once again race brings out the worst in people. But it also brings out the best as well.

The center stood behind its director's decision to choose the best actor for the role, regardless of race. His castmates also supported Giles. While some threatened and some cursed and some cancelled, others called to encourage the center and bought tickets to show their support. "The positive re-inforcement, the positive support outnumbers the negative at least 20-to-1," says Giles.

When black actors can play any role, when black men are accepted in other than negative stereotypes, then I'll know that we are on the road to ending racism in America. But stories like this one let me know we have much work to do and the time has not yet come.

Vote

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Studies, explained to the New York Times: "You have a prison system where black men are back in servitude, along with an economy where blacks are in the low paying jobs." So to many black Americans, "the system is basically rigged to diminish their political power and recreate the plantation system with prisons."

Civil rights organizations like the NAACP need to consider initiating campaigns to change election laws, permitting people who have served time in prison for felonies to be restored their full voting rights. To be denied the right to vote is to become a non-citizen in one's native land. And for African-American men who still enjoy the freedom to vote, we must continue to do so in ever-increasing numbers. Voting by itself won't solve all our problems, but it is an indispensable tool in the struggle for black freedom.

Dr. Manning Marable is Professor of History and the Director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies, Columbia University, New York City.

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Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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1785 E. Sahara Ave. Ste. 337
Las Vegas, Nevada

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