

COMMENTARY

Woman's death sentence overturned

By Dr. Conrad W. Worrill
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Six years ago, Judge John W. Crilly sentenced Geraldine Smith to death, making her Illinois' first woman sentenced to death since the state re-enacted the death penalty in 1977.

Recently, the Illinois Supreme Court threw out her death sentence but upheld her conviction, for the 1987 murder of her boyfriend's wife, Valerie McDonald.

Smith was sentenced based on uncorroborated testimony of troubled co-defendant Marva Golden. Golden, a long-time friend of Smith received a 20-year sentence as a result of her cooperation with the state. She is due to be released from prison soon.

The other co-defendant in this case, Eddie Williams, received a life sentence. Williams actually murdered McDonald.

Prior to her conviction, Smith, a mother and grandmother, was a respected member of her community. She has held steadfast that she had nothing to do with this murder and had countless witnesses to verify her position. Many of whom were prepared to testify, but were not called.

Ironically, Smith's lawyer, William Swano, turned out to be a "crooked lawyer who went on a spree of bribery and obstruction of justice in Cook County criminal cases." According to a

court record, Swano "was named in June of 1991 in a 75-page federal indictment as a co-conspirator" with a group charged with committing 19 murders.

Further records reveal that the indictment was withdrawn against Swano in exchange for his testimony against the others. He pled guilty to federal racketeering charges and received a four-year prison sentence and was suspended from practicing law.

A 1989 Amnesty International publication titled, "When 'The State Kills: The Death Penalty - A Human Rights Issue'" stated: "The death penalty is irrevocable. It sends innocent people to their deaths. It has no special power to prevent crime.

It is a particularly cruel, calculated and cold-blooded form of killing; the ultimate inhumane and degrading punishment.

It is imposed to punish prisoners for their political beliefs and when inflicted for criminal offenses it often becomes a judicial lottery."

African-Americans need to rethink our position on the death penalty. The death penalty does not reduce crime in the African-American community and whites are getting rich off the booming prison industry that we are fueling.

Dr. Worrill is the National Chairman of the National Black United Front.

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NAACP misguided on hotel industry

By John William Templeton
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The best thing that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has done in the past 25 years is to launch its economic reciprocity program.

National hotel chains have been the first industry to undergo the NAACP's scrutiny, regarding their record in hiring, procurement, ownership and other issues that show a willingness to provide a return on the billions that African-Americans spend on hospitality.

Joining the NAACP in the battle are more than 150 national organizations that have promised to use the NAACP report card in their purchasing decisions.

Six months after the announcement of the first report card, President Kweisi Mfume called for a withdrawal of patronage from chains which refused to complete the questionnaire.

That and the fact that the highest scoring chain only merited a "C" should add an additional level of pressure.

It is hard to sustain negative action over a long period of time, a fact that the chain owners are banking on. They also have the luxury of feeling that we have no alternatives but to deal with them.

However, broadcaster Tony Brown has been calling for blacks to pool their hospitality spending for 20 years. Perhaps the next step is to talk to someone else besides the American hotel chains.

There are business people like Jamaican entrepreneur Gordon "Butch" Stewart. He owns

the Sandals hotel chain, the winner of the top resort hotel ranking in the world. Fresh from that success, Stewart has launched a new resort chain called Beaches. He has also taken over the formerly-government-owned Air Jamaica, building it into the largest foreign-owned carrier out of Miami International Airport.

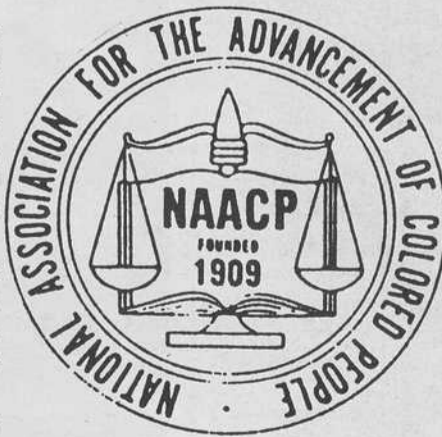
Last month, Air Jamaica opened a new hub in Montego Bay, allowing its planes to fly direct from the United States and also beginning direct flights to Havana.

In addition to moving our business off-shore, we should also partner with entrepreneurs like Stewart to build facilities in the United States.

Boycotts are a protest strategy. Competition is the worst nightmare of the chain owners.

In industries where black businesses have achieved success, like the Negro Baseball League or the recording industry, it has been the industries that have rushed to achieve inclusion. Our mistake was to give up our leverage by allowing our own hotels, baseball leagues and movie theaters to go under.

Twenty years ago, a newspaper in Winston-Salem asked a major North Carolina bank why it had no branches in black neighborhoods. Receiving no good answer, we asked the black-owned Mechanics and Farmers Bank to open a branch there. Before the Mechanics and Farmers Bank was finished, there was a brand new branch of the first bank right across the street. The moral of the story is — when people don't want your business, take it somewhere else. They'll come looking for you.



The new black power

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Joyce Roché wanted to be a teacher. But thanks to the Civil Rights movement and affirmative action, Roché hopped aboard the entrepreneurial express and has been chugging along ever since.

The current issue of *Black Enterprise* magazine chronicles Roché, president and chief operating officer of Carson, Inc., a hair and facial care products company, and 25 other top flight black businesswomen.

Roché's success isn't unusual among post-civil rights African-

Americans, many of whom have risen higher than their forbearers in American business.

They run their own businesses, wield significant authority in multi-million-dollar companies, guide the production of material goods and oversee billions of dollars in investments.

This month's *Fortune* Magazine pays homage to "The New Black Power" created by Roché and others.

The new black power adds achievement, success, independence, financial security and a sense of belonging.

"Our job for the twenty-first century is to strengthen our economic base through the creation of business owners and entrepreneurs," said Myron F. Robinson, president of the Urban League of greater Cleveland. "We must no longer be satisfied

watching in awe, from a distance as others play the game."

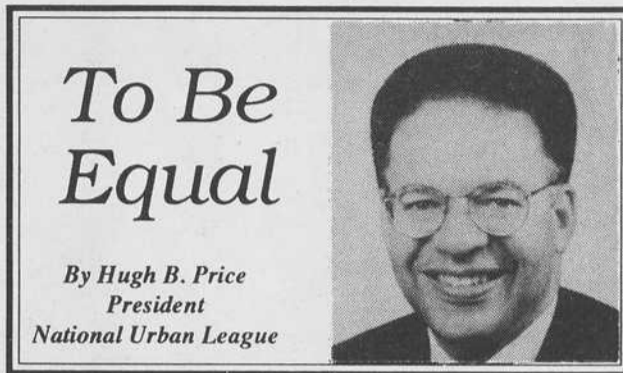
Robinson and his colleagues led our National Economic Development Summit in Cleveland in May. Attended by officials from local, regional, national and Fortune 500 companies, it informed minorities about franchising supplier and distributor opportunities and exposed American businesses to a new talent pool.

In June, our Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP) held its 28th annual conference in Atlanta.

Supported by corporate and individual contributions, the conference featured business executives and government officials teaching as visiting professors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The event gave students a keener sense of what it takes to succeed in today's world. BEEP has helped recruit for more than 120 companies and government agencies.

These and other efforts must continue so that we may build on our successes. The climb to economic self-sufficiency is long and the venomous head of discrimination can strike at any time. So we cannot rest on our laurels.

However, we can take heart because both magazine articles underscore the plight of many black entrepreneurs to ensure future successes reach even higher heights.



Clinton cannot heal the racial divide

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Several weeks ago President Clinton kicked off his campaign to heal the racial divide in America. Bill Clinton is one of those politicians who has built his career off of reinforcing that racial divide.

But like any politician who bases his principles on the polls, the focus groups and the political winds, what he did yesterday has

no bearing on what he does today. Everything is for political gain. Little is for the good of the country. And nothing is for the good of African-Americans.

In his speech at the University of California in San Diego he told the country that we have the opportunity to overcome the racial polarization that still plagues America and create a "truly multi-racial democracy." President Clinton says we need to have a constructive national conversation on race.

I agree that we need to work to create a "truly multi-racial democracy." But in order to have the meaningful conversation that President Clinton is calling for, then some true things about the situation that we, as black people, find ourselves in, are going to have to get said.

Some of those things are going to have to

be about the issue of political power.

The long-standing inequities between black and white America — in education opportunity and the quality of education — in job opportunity and the quality of jobs — persist because the current political arrangement has kept us marginalized as a political force.

This problem must be addressed, if we as a country and black people as a community, are going to overcome. And no amount of commissions, or conversations, or apologies

for slavery are going to make a difference unless we do that.

How do we do that? Slavery may have been abolished and "apologies" may be forthcoming, but most of America's key political institutions were created during slavery — notably the Democrats and the Republicans and still bear the slavery mentality.

Until we create a new political party that includes African-Americans as full partners in its inception, conception and design, we will remain without the political power we need. Moreover, it's building this new party — together with other Americans — that will heal the racial divide.

