

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Mainstream America's contempt misdirected

Once again a black face is being used to rally sentiment around yet another problem that affects not just blacks, but the world community.

Twenty-year-old Nushawn Williams is accused of knowingly infecting at least nine women and girls with the AIDS virus in rural upstate New York.

Hainous crimes? If true, yes. But Williams does not deserve to be the poster boy for why America should summon up all its reserves for an all-out offensive on the disease. That should have been done a long time ago.

Where was the furor when Earvin "Majic" Johnson revealed he had the HIV virus? How come Arthur Ashe's death did not stir rumblings from those in the medical community to study safer ways to do blood transfusions? AIDS and the HIV virus plague prison populations nationwide, but little, if anything, is done to address that problem. Why?

It seems that only when a black person does something hurtful to a white person that mainstream America circles the wagons, takes up arms and prepares to fight, when in reality, we should all be fighting for the common good all the time.

Case in point. O.J. Simpson became a moral lightning rod for those championing the fight against domestic abuse. Sadly, women are beaten and killed every day in this country. The Simpson media circus had little lasting effect on the way men are socialized in this country. While you read this editorial, women are getting beaten and killed. And it's not Simpson's fault.

Myriad other examples exist. During the 1988 presidential election, Willie Horton, a Massachusetts convict, was released on furlough. While free, Horton committed murder. Former President George Bush launched a media campaign, using Horton's face, to weaken then-Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis' bid for the White House.

In 1990, a federal judge in Florida declared 2 Live Crew's album "As Nasty As They Wanna Be," to be obscene. The Miami-based group became the first in this country's music history to have its album banned from being sold to minors.

Sexual harassment was not invented when Anita Hill accused soon-to-be confirmed Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Locally, Clark County Commission Chairwoman Yvonne Atkison Gates is getting reamed by local press and critics for what they perceive as ethics violations.

So no matter what the news is, it doesn't grab the headlines with fear or horror until it can have a face of color attached to it.

Racism becomes the real perpetrator. Where's the fairness?



The welfare reform mismatch

Special to Sentinel-Voice

In the first months of welfare reform, there's been a wave of euphoria about the sharp decline in the number of welfare recipients. Fueled by a strong national economy, caseloads across the country have fallen by about 14 percent in the 14 months since Congress passed and President Clinton signed the law overhauling the welfare system.

But now the welfare reform law "mismatch" is becoming more and more evident. That mismatch is the gap between the rhetoric about what the law would accomplish and the reality of what is happening.

It involves the difference between the strength of the national economy as a whole and the various strengths — and weaknesses — of state and local economies. It involves the difference between the requirements of the national law and the laws of the various states, which in most cases are tougher. And it involves whether the level of education and the job skills of the welfare recipients can easily match the needs of the local job market.


The fact is we're now learning that the mismatch is a great deal wider than acknowledged.

We all knew that the early going would be easy, because the go-getters among those on welfare would go get jobs. It's true — and good — that all the talk about drastic changes in welfare assistance has pushed some welfare recipients to discover within themselves ambition, ability and a sense of responsibility. We're heartened that thousands of folks on welfare have managed to find work.

But we also knew all along — and joined others in warning

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
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— that the flaws of the welfare reform act would quickly surface, and that the day would come when the strict welfare time limits would endanger children on welfare whose parents would not be able to find jobs.

The stories, which prove us right, are just beginning to trickle in.

Recently, the *New York Times* reported on the welfare situation in the Mississippi Delta region: the poorest region in the poorest state in the country. There, the unemployment rate is about 10 percent, dependable child-care arrangements are scarce, education levels low and public transportation non-existent.

One study of job prospects in the region indicated that there would be one new job for every 254 families leaving the welfare rolls. About half of the people who found jobs when the state instituted its welfare reform program two years ago were working as little as fifteen months later. That was largely due, on the one hand, to a mismatch between the level of education and job skills the jobs required, and, on the other, the fact that many single mothers gave up their jobs rather than continue round-trip commutes of three to five hours away from their children.

In recent months, for every

welfare recipient placed in a job, two were dropped, at least temporarily, from the welfare rolls for failing to meet the state's work rules.

Mississippi is far from the only state that has high rates of poverty and low governmental spending. But even states with strong economies are having difficulty matching welfare recipients and work.

For example, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that in New Jersey adults in just one quarter of the 80,000 families in which adults and children receive welfare benefits have found some kind of job.

In addition, a recent national survey showed that just six states were operating computer systems capable of tracking how long a recipient

has been on welfare to enforce the new national five-year limit. And many states have no way of determining whether all the people who have left the welfare rolls have actually gotten jobs. The *Journal* report suggested that "a year of nationwide hype about welfare overhaul may have had more impact than new welfare rules themselves."

None of these difficulties are surprising. Since last year, before the law passed, one national study warned that fewer than half of those pushed off welfare would find work.

Yes, every able-bodied person should earn his or her keep. But one must have a job to earn one's keep. It is neither compassionate nor pragmatic to pretend that just moving people off the welfare rolls will solve the problem of people on welfare.

To prevent welfare reform from becoming a calamity for children and parents, the Clinton Administration, Congress and the states must respond positively to the question that has always loomed over any plan to reform welfare for the better: Where are the jobs?

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