

COMMENTARY

# Walker's hard work blueprints paths to success

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Sarah Breedlove was born to ex-slaves on a Louisiana plantation just after the Civil War. Her formal schooling ended early, soon after her parents died. She was married by fourteen, was soon a mother, and a widow by 20.

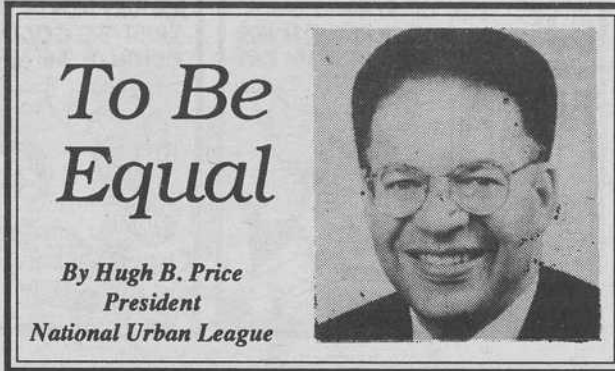
Determined to support herself and her daughter, she worked for 17 years as a laundress, seemingly destined to live out the life of poverty and hardship American society then set aside as the special lot of black people.

Instead, Sarah Breedlove — as Madame C. J. Walker (she took her second husband's name) — proved in the first two decades of this century that she possessed one of the sharpest business minds American society had yet seen. She concocted a hair ointment and process for treating black women's hair and scalp that

was an immediate success (and, unquestionably, greatly enhanced the self-image of millions of black women).

Then, she — with her husband initially, they later divorced — used her keen organizational and marketing skills to build a huge company that employed some 5,000 black women in a business empire comprising of factories and laboratories, beauty salons and schools, and door-to-door saleswomen, the "Walker agents," that stretched across the United States, the Caribbean and parts of South America.

Walker was one of the first American women to become a self-made millionaire, and she did not deny herself the luxuries such wealth made available. But she was also extraordinarily generous to black educational institutions and charities and a passionate



## To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price  
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advocate of women becoming economically self-sufficient. Her will stipulated that two-thirds of her fortune go to various charities, and that her company, which is still in business, always be controlled by a woman.

The United States Postal Service honored Walker Jan. 28 by unveiling a commemorative postal stamp featuring her photograph at ceremonies in Indianapolis, Ind., where Walker established



her company's headquarters in 1910. The celebration adding Walker to the Service's Black Heritage stamp series was, of course, timed to coincide with the beginning of Black History Month.

Although she died in 1919, Walker is hardly just an historical figure of note. Her achievements and her spirit carry a powerful message to the tasks blacks today must take on and conquer.

The clue to that message

can be found in the words Walker herself spoke:

She said, "If I have accomplished anything in life, it is because I have been willing to work hard. I never started anything doubtingly ... There is no royal flower-strewn road to success, and if there is, I have not found it, for what success I have obtained is the result of many sleepless nights and real hard work."

Walker possessed an ambition, intelligence, shrewdness, and, as she put it, a capacity for working very hard for a very long time.

We can go very far if we use our own gifts as Walker did. We shouldn't forget that she represented the zeal blacks used to find the pathways to success; a zeal that led to entrepreneurship.

Thus, we were heartened by the recent conference held by the Rev. Jesse Jackson's

Rainbow/PUSH coalition in New York's financial district that discussed the need of the securities industry and the corporate sector to expand opportunities for minorities. The more voices within Black America that push this message, the more progress we'll make.

For, within the celebration of entrepreneurship and the pursuit of economic power, there is something even more important and that something is the celebration of the importance of work and the sense of accomplishment and personal value it brings.

Of that, Madame C. J. Walker's words, again, speak volumes. "I had to make my own living and my own opportunity! But I made it! That's why I want to say ... don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come ... Get up and make them!"

### A VOICE FROM THE HILL

## Congressional solutions to juvenile crime hurts black youth

By George Wilson  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Now that lawmakers have returned from an extended vacation, it is time for them to take care of the real business of governing the nation's affairs.

Among the bills to be considered by the Senate is S.10 or the Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act.

This legislation is touted as the answer to the growing problem of youth crime and violence. Strangely, it comes at a time when, according to available information, youth crime is declining nationally.

However, when politicians want to make an election year point, they never let the facts stand in the way. Being "tough on crime" can make the difference between getting elected or having to seek other employment.

On the surface, it would appear reasonable to support any legislation that purports to reduce crime, and some of the sections of S.10 are laudable. However, a closer look at the bill reveals that some sections are bound to have an adverse effect on black youth.

We already know that a criminal record can almost guarantee unemployment, the loss of voting rights or the chance to run for public office if the crime committed is a felony.

For the uninitiated, a felony is a crime that carries a possible sentence of a year or more. S.10 would make it perfectly legitimate for juvenile records to be shared with schools and colleges, potential employers and even military recruiters.

Another part of S.10 includes the very real possibility of placing juveniles in adult prisons.

Without giving the sordid details, one can

only imagine what could happen to a teen imprisoned with adult criminals.

Under the bill, states would be able to share a \$500 million block grant for five years to build new juvenile detention facilities, fingerprint juvenile offenders, conduct DNA tests and upgrade information-sharing capability.

There is one other provision which should cause a little concern among those who buy pagers for their children. Section 213 of the bill is entitled "clone pager." This section would allow enforcement personnel to submit an application to use a numeric clone pager (a device that receives telephone numbers or other numeric information sent to a pager at the same time the pager receives it), in the same as trap and trace devices are used.

S.10 isn't law just yet, but it will be voted on in the Senate very soon. The Children's Defense Fund's Black Community Crusade for Children is leading the charge against the Senate passage of the bill, which has already passed the House. This matter should be of grave concern to all who say they care about youth.

Supporters of the bill will argue that the legislation allocates money for increased funding of Boys and Girls Clubs and some other preventive programs. That is true, but the major thrust of the bill is on punishment and providing more bodies to fill present and future prisons.

Why not turn the formula upside down and place more money on prevention and less on incarceration? There is still time for community voices to be heard.

George Wilson is a veteran Capitol Hill correspondent for the American Urban Radio Network.

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### Carl Rowan's Commentary

## Disparate cocaine sentences highlight discrimination

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Sometimes it takes some brutal language to explain to ruling white Americans the "little" ways in which they keep race a divisive, violent issue in America. My plain-talk contribution for today is this:

By insisting on an unfair disparity in sentencing for the sale of crack cocaine as against powdered cocaine you are practicing a kind of racism and class discrimination that undermines our war against illicit drugs. You intensify the horrible violence that revolves around the campaign against drug abuse and make "the racial divide" an increasingly ineradicable force in American life.

With this blatant discrimination in sentencing, you are filling American prisons more and more disproportionately with poor, lower-class black and brown youngsters who sell and use "cheap" crack cocaine while you blink an eye or give lighter sentences to the mostly-white affluent classes that party on powdered cocaine that is so costly the drug cartels will corrupt and kill you and anyone else to deliver it.

Understand, now, the distinction that Congress has made. If I go into the ghettos of Washington and sell just 5 grams of crack cocaine, the judge presiding over my conviction *must* give me the mandatory sentence of five years in prison. But if I go to a party in an affluent suburb, I have to sell 500 grams of powdered cocaine before the mandatory five-year sentence comes into play. That 100-to-1 discrepancy destroys any



CARL ROWAN

pretense of "equal protection under the laws."

Somehow the Clinton White House and the Janet Reno Justice Department haven't been able to see the outrageousness of this sentencing disparity. They have insulted poor and minority people with a

cockamamie argument that poor, minority crack addicts tend to become more violent and destructive in behavior, or looser in terms of morals than a wealthy white junkie who gets stoned on the powdered stuff.

So the Clinton administration opposed the U.S. Sentencing Commission when it proposed to wipe out the disparity regarding forms of cocaine. When 95 percent of Americans convicted of crack cocaine crimes are non-white, it was dismaying obvious to the Commission that the big sentences were being laid on the little guys. But Congress refused to make the "big change."

Well, justice be done! The Sentencing Commission has come up with its great American compromise. It suggests that I can slide into the ghetto with soul brothers tonight and peddle 25 to 75 grams of crack before I face a mandatory five years in prison; or I can go to a fat-cat party with my white pals and "deal" 125 to 375 grams of powdered cocaine before I face a mandatory five years in the slammer. They are reducing the justice disparity for being poor and non-white from 100:1 to 5:1! They have overcome!

Who will be the first to tell me that "We've made a lot of progress in race relations?"