

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

White House snubs NNPA on Africa trip

While President Clinton is busy trying to mend centuries-old wounds in Africa, he could do well to tend to the business of healing a fractured relationship with the Black Press here at home.

Clinton is the first sitting president to visit Africa in more than two decades, and while a cadre of prominent blacks are tailing him, including a few notable black news people, the nation's largest black press syndicate is conspicuous by its absence.

No one from the National Newspaper Publishers Association is there covering the event. NNPA officials said they were never asked.

How could this happen? The finger-pointing begins.

According to a press release by White House spokesman Mike McCurry, most of the black newspapers couldn't afford to send journalists to follow the president on his historic 10-day visit through places like Ghana, Botswana, South Africa, Senegal and other nations. The way the press release reads, black newspaper publishers were queried about their interest in the trip but none could front the money.

But that argument holds little weight. Had the NNPA been contacted, its members would have been privy to what was going on.

NNPA president Dorothy Leavell said the organization was never contacted about tagging along on Clinton's jaunt through the motherland, therefore the White House couldn't know whether a newspaper could afford to send a photographer and reporter or whether the NNPA could have picked the individuals. Leavell said the White House also snubbed the NNPA in 1995 when New York Congressman Charles Rangel visited Africa.

This is sad. Such a snafu is almost laughable. It would seem that on an event of this magnitude all the White House's public relations hounds would be barking down the heels of every black newspaper in the country, realizing the political coo they could score.

By including the Black Press in something so significant, they should have reasoned that Clinton could have pushed his approval ratings even higher by pacifying — for the time being — black publishers and their readers and giving them the slightest inkling that he thinks the Black Press matters. They should have reasoned that the president could parlay the feel-good trip into points for his party which desperately wants to wrest control of the House and Senate from the Republicans.

But he didn't. And we're left to gripe.

THE NEW DOCTOR/PATIENT RELATIONSHIP



Report reminds us of challenges

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Early this month the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation released a report updating the famous Kerner Commission study of 1968, which had surveyed America's racial landscape, and, in a dire tone, concluded that "Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal."

The Eisenhower Foundation report, *The Millennium Breach: Richer, Poorer and Racially Apart*, acknowledges that progress has occurred since the late 1960s. But its conclusion is equally ominous.

"The Kerner Commission's prophecy has come to pass," it states. "While leaders and pundits talk of 'full employment,' inner city unemployment is at crisis levels. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and minorities are suffering disproportionately. The private market has failed the inner city. The prison system is a symbol of discrimination. A class and racial breach is widening again as we begin the new millennium."

Are the report's findings true?


Before I answer, it's crucial to recognize the long-standing tradition of racial prophecy the Millennium Breach document pays homage to.

In fact, that tradition of scholarly and literary warnings to White America to do right on race goes back three centuries.

In the twentieth century it includes W.E.B. Du Bois'

To Be Equal

By **Hugh B. Price**
President
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classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*, of 1904, and *An American Dilemma*, the massive tome published in 1943 by the task force of scholars headed by the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal.

But the most powerful antecedent of both the Kerner and the Eisenhower studies may be *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin's searing book-length essay, published in 1962 amid the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement.

The apocalyptic vision of the Biblical verse Baldwin used to end the book — *God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time* — took on a more ominous tone in the late 1960s, when the pent-up anger of many of the nation's black ghettos exploded.

The sense of pessimism those explosions produced in some quarters was the backdrop to the Kerner Commission's warning as well as its explicit recommendations for change.

Actually, the Kerner Report got it backwards (perhaps deliberately, the better to provoke action).

America had been two societies, separate and

extremely unequal, until the Civil Rights Movement began to compel White America to live up to its democratic rhetoric.

The racial turmoil of the late 1960s was a consequence of White America not moving fast enough. It confirmed Martin Luther King Jr.'s powerful insight in his "I Have A Dream" speech that revolutionary changes in the status of African-Americans were required.

"1963 is not an end, but a beginning," he declared at the March on Washington. "Those who hope the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now

be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual ... The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of Justice emerges."

In that regard, the Kerner Report formally ratified King's insight.

Ten years ago, another massive study of America's racial landscape, *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society*, noting Kerner's conclusion, declared that despite important changes, "there are striking resemblances between the description of 1968 and the position of black Americans reflected in our findings."

The Eisenhower Foundation study, as I said, is even more pessimistic.

So, I come back to my question: Is the study right?

I say yes and no.

On the bright side, college campuses are vastly more integrated today. So is the

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