

## COMMENTARY

# The emperor's new clothes: After welfare reform

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Remember the story of the Emperor's New Clothes? Only one brave soul was unafraid to tell the emperor that he was naked, as I remember it. Everyone else pretended that the emperor was fully clothed. Well, while government officials are telling us that so-called welfare reform has been successful, the reality is that they really don't know what has happened to tens of thousands of persons no longer on welfare rolls.

The reality is that many who are working with the poor are telling us that the poor are now poorer and that while welfare reform may succeed in ending welfare as we know it, it is not ending poverty as we know it. They are telling us that the emperor has on no clothes.

Well over a million cases have been dropped from the nation's welfare rolls. But statistics from the U.S. General Accounting Office seem to indicate that the majority of

the families whose benefits were terminated did not find work. The problem: there are too many unskilled, untrained, poorly educated workers and too few jobs to match.

Take Wisconsin, the state often being held up as the model for welfare reform.

A study done by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee found that only 34 percent of those dropped from welfare rolls found full-time jobs. Only one in six of the families cut off was now above the poverty line. In addition, people on welfare are required to drop out of education or training programs and take the first available job. That requirement ensures that these people will forever be poor, whether on welfare or not.

Consider Massachusetts. One advocate for the poor who has worked with the poor and homeless for more than 10 years said the overwhelming majority of the parents in the families she works with have

## Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



no high school diploma and little to offer in terms of job experience or marketable skills.

"These women have no chance of competing in today's job market, but the state expects them to become economically self-sufficient without any training or assistance," she said, adding that since the state is not providing job training for these women, the time limits are going to expire at the end of 1998 and these families will have nothing to fall back on.

Unfortunately, many Americans believe that the problems of poor families have

gone away with the welfare rolls. Many Americans mistakenly believe that job training or preparation has occurred, when it usually has not. Some are merely given pep-talks by their caseworkers or assigned to a brief "job preparation seminar" which tells them how to dress and how to speak on the phone, then puts them at a desk with a telephone and a newspaper to try to get job interviews.

Wisconsin State Sen. Gwendolynne Moore calls the pretense of job readiness in her own state the "You Go, Girl" strategy.

Many Americans believe

that all these folks formerly on welfare now have real jobs — that they just needed that extra push to get out in to the job market. But look at workfare, the program which requires that welfare recipients work to continue to receive their benefits. It sounds like a good idea on the surface: Working for your welfare check. But Jobs with Justice, a national coalition of organizations, warns that workfare participants have proven to be an irresistible, cheap labor force to provide falling city services.

In New York City, for instance, workfare participants have been cleaning subways and buses and streets, often without proper protective clothing. They have simply replaced other low-paid city workers with even lower salaried laborers who get even fewer benefits.

Many Americans think that since they have not heard horror stories about the end of welfare

there aren't any. But many homeless shelters and soup kitchens are finding, feeding and housing more poor people.

Churches are finding that families are running out of money earlier in the month, and that while they once needed help with food and energy bills, they now need help with rent.

As our nation's wealth grows astronomically, with the stock market likely to reach 10,000 before the end of the year, are we brave enough to tell the emperor that he has no clothes on?

Are we willing to say that in this wealthiest of nations, let's not just end welfare as we know it, but let's end poverty as we know it? Are we willing to call upon state and federal officials to provide real job training and education for real families so that we might all march through the streets well-clothed and fed and housed?

If we are, we will see to it that the emperor really has clothes on.

## Empowerment programs needed to stem black male suicide rate

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Comedian turned political activist Dick Gregory always got chuckles from Black audiences when he quipped that Whites kill themselves by jumping from a tall building while Blacks kill themselves by jumping from a low basement.

For decades Blacks took comfort in the notion that suicide was a White thing. Despite the long, brutal history of slavery, segregation, institutional racism, racially-motivated violence and poverty, Blacks didn't kill themselves. That's not so any more.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported that more young Black males than ever are killing themselves. They are killing themselves at a faster rate than White males, are six times more likely to kill themselves than Black females, and are more likely to use a firearm. This probably understates the suicide death toll. Black suicides are more likely to be misreported, or underreported, and the astronomically high murder rates of young Black males conceal what often are the self-destructive death wishes of some.

Drug and alcohol use, high unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, low self-esteem, poverty, urban dislocation, family breakdown, the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among Black gay men and their subsequent ostracism and the easy access to guns are the prime factors cited as reasons why more young Black men are taking their lives.

But there's a deeper reason. Young, poor Blacks have been the major victims of the two-decade long emphasis by Black leaders and organizations on creating more opportunities for middle-class Blacks in business. This pursuit left them without

credible role models and mentors and quickened their march to the social and economic outer limits of society.

Faced with the prospect of fewer jobs, a crumbling educational system, gang violence, arrest and imprisonment, some turned to guns, gangs and drugs to survive. This only deepened their sense of hopelessness and despair. The first deadly consequence of the failure of Black leaders and organizations to develop active programs and strategies to aid young Black males was a soaring murder rate; the latest is a soaring suicide rate.

It is not all doom and gloom. Black professionals, educators, businesspersons and health professionals must recognize that the growing suicide rate among young Black males is a real crisis and develop intervention strategies that include: More programs to provide educational scholarships, career counseling, job and skills training for young Black males; better resources at junior and senior high schools for psychological counseling, testing and early identification of at risk youth; support for tougher gun control measures; broader backing for male mentoring, peer counseling, rites of passage and conflict resolution programs.

They should sponsor mental health clinics and workshops for parents and students to help parents detect emotional problems in their children and provide resources for treatment.

The rising suicide rate of young Black men is a warning signal to Black leaders to develop comprehensive programs to counter the sense of hopelessness. They will not bring back those who have taken their lives, but they can prevent more young Black men from killing themselves.

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## Financial regulations often more racist than the police

By John William Templeton  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

A recent Congressional hearing concluded that more than 70 percent of the nation's random traffic stops involve African-American motorists.

But the transgressions by financial regulation "police-like" the Federal Reserve System, Comptroller of the Currency, Office of Thrift Supervision, Home Loan Bank Board and Securities and Exchange Commission might be even more blatantly racist. These regulatory agencies have failed to enforce the Community Reinvestment Act which could scuttle some of the effects of their racist practices.

Imagine if the Bloods and Crips ran the recruitment and hiring processes for law enforcement. If someone got "too big," the police would bring them in. That's how American financial regulation works.

Bond dealer Lehman Brothers gets its chairman named Treasury Secretary; the American Stock Exchange head becomes chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission; banks make up much of the boards of the Federal Reserve Banks and Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan has his position for life.

If regulation sprouts up that does not meet with industry approval, they schedule a coffee session at the White House. Now we have "gangsta" bankers like Citicorp. Though one of the last remaining laws, called the Glass-Steagall Act, keeps banks from owning insurance companies, Citicorp and Travelers Insurance decided to merge anyway, and said the combination will be the largest financial institution in the United States.

If one thinks the "gangsta" label inappropriate, Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., has reason to think it very suitable. Although her California constituents cannot borrow money from Citicorp without impeccable credit, somehow the brother of former Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari was able to

access huge sums from Citicorp though he has been implicated in murder and drug deals. That deal is one of the reasons that Waters opposes the new Citigroup, which would require Congress to rewrite the banking law. Her amendment to the financial modernization bill would ban banks implicated in money laundering from merging.

In the inner city of San Francisco, Black residents have even more reason to think they're victims of a financial driveby. An apartment complex called the Fillmore Center, originally conceived by the late publisher and physician Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, is in the process of being sold by Citicorp to the latest in a long string of absentee developers, Elkor of Chicago, despite community appeals for local ownership.

The situation might never have arisen had not Bank of America, another merger aspirant, led local banks in refusing to lend money to Goodlett or anyone else Black in the Western Addition neighborhood. Although redevelopment began in 1961, by 1990, fewer than 150 home mortgages were found among Black homeowners in 7,000 housing units.

And its merger partner, Nationsbank, is the subject of a class action suit by Black mortgage applicants in the Washington, D.C. area and just got sanctioned for selling mutual funds to unsuspecting seniors. Its fine was less than that given to basketball's Latrell Sprewell. Bank of America is being sued by most of California's local government for allegedly mishandling proceeds of billions of dollars worth of municipal bonds.

If an individual were cutting corners like that, they would be under the jail. But when "da police" are "homeboys," doing the wrong thing allows you to get bigger.

Now if anyone comes along to threaten the bankers' "posse," then "da police" go after people like Joseph Jett, the Black bond dealer who lost his entire career and millions of dollars only to be vindicated in his case against Paine (See Regulations, Page 13)