

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

New breed of black leader: fiery, energetic

Times are changing.

More than a generation after the rewards harvested from protest started to appear — civil rights laws, affirmative action, voting privileges, entrepreneurial opportunities; the list goes on — a new breed of protest is ripening.

Its push includes even more demands on rights, more say-so in how its communities are run, how its children are taught, who governs and for how long and where its money goes.

Leading this push for empowerment are fresh-faced thirtysomething and fortysomething blacks. Far from stoic or easily pacified, they acknowledge the gains made by their predecessors to open public accommodations and schools but they have their aims set higher: opening America itself.

They are prying open doors too long privy to the good-old boys network by abandoning the comfort zone. Increasingly, these fiery movers-and-shakers are like J.C. Watts, R-Okla., leaving the Democratic Party for the GOP. And when converts like Watts espouse conservative principles — lower taxes, less government, school vouchers — and more blacks are listening.

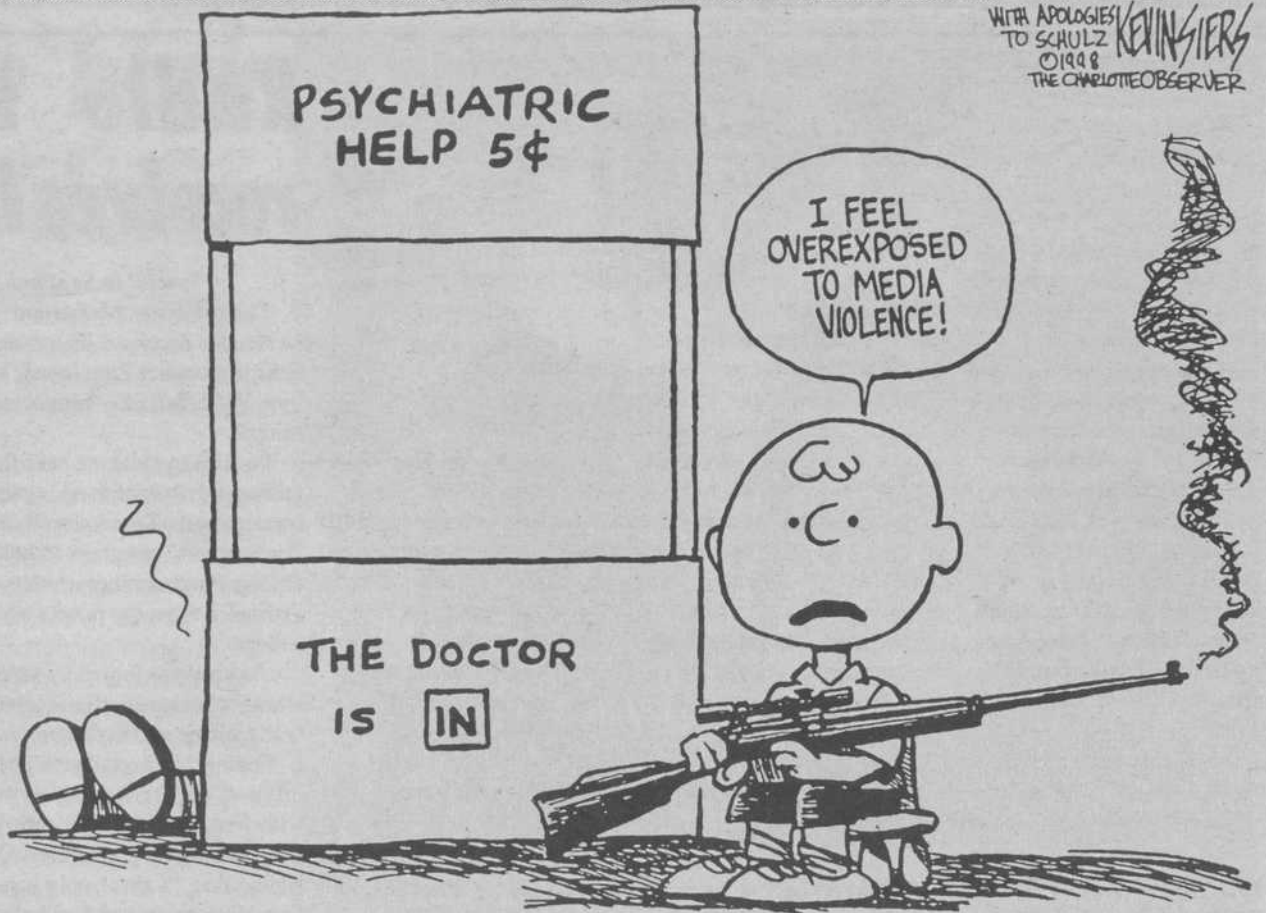
These leaders embody the characteristics of Oakland mayoral candidate Shannon Reeves: armed to the hilt with statistics; well-versed in leadership — having refined their skills in civic organizations — and energetic. Like Reeves, they recognize apathy as one of the biggest obstacles toward black self-empowerment.

Much to the chagrin of their civil rights-bred fathers and mothers, these leaders — some of whom profess no partisan leaning but whose agendas appeal to a republican — have latched on to certain concepts espoused by the Nation of Islam. They attended the Million Man March and soaked in the messages of economic reciprocity, moral virtue, personal responsibility and community service. They refuse to kowtow to the older generation who equate Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakan with black separatism.

Increasingly, these leaders are stepping out of the “power circles” in government and industry and into schools, neighborhoods, community centers and rural areas to preach self-reliance. They’re more apt to appear on BET or MTV talking about issues affecting young people; their more likely to show up at an NBA or NFL-sponsored civic activity and speak to children; their more inclined to “Rock the Vote.”

They speak a language young people can relate to and explain complex issues in layman’s terms. And, worst of all, they’re more likely to chastise blacks than blame whites for their problems.

They couldn’t have come along at a better time.



Suburbs becoming dens of habitual violence

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The images of the mayhem that tore apart Springfield, Ore., last Thursday are by now familiar to us all, no matter how far away we live from the six suburban and rural communities where since last October heavily armed teenagers have gunned down nearly three score of their classmates and teachers.

The toll is stunning: Pearl, Miss., 3 dead, 7 wounded; West Paducah, Ky., 3 dead, 5 wounded; Jonesboro, Ark., 5 dead, 10 wounded; Edinboro, Penn., 1 dead, 3 wounded; Fayetteville, Tenn., 1 dead; and now, Springfield, 4 dead, 26 wounded.

Familiar, too, is the grief of the survivors and the shock of residents of these communities, and many of us in the larger society who have followed news of the carnage. “Why is this happening here?” is the question being asked with increasing disquiet.

“There is no sense to it,” Gary Bowden, the wrestling coach at Springfield’s Thurston High School, said last Thursday, struggling to cope with the enormity of the crime there.


But it’s not true that there’s “no sense” to these killings.

Many people have identified the causes of these outbursts of horrific violence. “This is not a school problem,” said Norma Paulus, Oregon state superintendent of schools. “This is a societal problem.”

Said Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber: “All of us should look at how we have failed as a society and how this could happen in the heart of Oregon.

To Be Equal

By **Hugh B. Price**
President
National Urban League



It has been a priority to build prison cells and prison beds — after the fact. These actions in no way prevent juvenile violence.”

Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith of the Harvard School of Public Health suggested on ABC’s “Nightline” last week that we are seeing the “second wave” of the youth homicide epidemic that primarily convulsed black and Hispanic inner-city neighborhoods during the past 15 years now erupt in white small towns and rural communities.

“The late ’80s, early ’90s was when the youth homicide rate in urban America almost doubled, starting with what one might have thought were isolated incidents,” Prothrow-Stith said. “Eventually, we learned to understand that it was an epidemic. I can’t, as a public health person, look at what’s happened in schools over the last six to eight months and say these are isolated events. If you take troubled kids and add guns and add a precipitating event in a society that glamorizes explosive responses to anger, you’ve got danger and I think it’s now happening pretty much across the country.”

Many experts on children and adolescents believe that

dynamic is helping to fuel the extraordinary callousness and the calculated indiscriminate ferocity shown by these young killers.

Sissela Bok, a philosopher and ethicist who has studied violence in America, told the New York Times last week, “We have movie role models showing violence as fun, and video games where you kill and get rewarded for killing, for hours and hours. It is a very combustible mix: enraged young people with access to semiautomatic weapons, exposed to violence as entertainment, violence shown as exciting and thrilling.”

But the situation is far from hopeless. The successful effort

by public agencies, private institutions and community organizations in Boston to reduce the city’s climbing youth homicide rate is just a piece of the voluminous quilt of evidence that we do know how to help great numbers of young people live productively. The current spasm of horrific school violence is another warning that American society must intensify its efforts to do so.

Finally, there is another point about these murderous incidents that begs attention — a point that becomes clear if one imagines it had been African-American youths in six different inner-city neighborhoods who had turned their predominately black high schools into killing fields.

We know what “answers” would have been put forth — and what blame assessed — then. We know that we would have been subjected to the purplest “mean street of the ghetto” prose then — prose that is used to implicitly declare the problems of the inner cities (See Suburbs, Page 16)

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