

COMMENTARY

# Guns, violence, youth becoming synonymous

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
There's something wrong in America.

When I was growing up the old folks used to say that when white folks had a cold, black folks had pneumonia, meaning we always had a more serious version of whatever social ills the nation was dealing with.

And usually, it was when it got beyond the cold stage in the white community that we began to see the problem addressed.

Thus, when drugs started really being a problem in white communities, there was a national effort to deal with them. That was especially true with the spread of heroin in the

1960's and the crack epidemic of the 1980's.

This time it is violence and the widespread availability of guns. They devastated African-American and Latino communities in the early part of this decade, with drive-by shootings which resulted in thousands of deaths of innocent people as well as gang members.

But now that this deadly violence is reaching into the larger community and is responsible for the murder of innocent children, parents and teachers in Philadelphia, Pearl, Miss., Jonesboro, Ark., West Paducah, Ky., and Springfield, Ore., and since the threat of



Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson

similar incidents in communities across the nation exists, we should expect an outcry against the availability of guns. But there is only silence.

How many children have to die by gun violence in this nation before we will do

something? How many teachers, parents or bystanders must die? How many heart-wrenching stories do we have to hear? How many pictures of shocked communities and urban centers do we have to see? How many mothers' tears must we watch? How many children have to act as pallbearers before we'll do something?

And, as we're burying our dead and trying to heal our communities, will we allow the politicians to offer the wrong solutions.

Coming before the Senate is the Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act, S.10. That bill will allow children to be put in jail with adults; it will protect guns rather than children and will build prisons

to house our children rather than fund evening and summer activities to keep them safe and out of trouble. It will also require that juvenile records be kept in the FBI's computer system and trail a person for life, ensuring the child is shut out of a life of opportunity.

This quick fix bill does nothing to deal with the myriad causes of the violence racking our communities. It does nothing to stop the availability of guns. It does nothing to stop the violence still found on television, despite the so-called reforms. It does nothing to stop the violence in computer and video games. It does nothing to stop the violence on cartoons. It does nothing to provide psychological services to troubled children.

The Oregon parents killed by their son had been desperately seeking help for him. This quick fix bill does nothing to provide recreational programs or anti-gang programs for at-risk children like the accused killer.

Since it faults only the children with the guns, not the manufacturers who sold them or the people — parents

included — who provide the access, the bill scapegoats children of color.

African-American and Latino children are one-third of the population, but they are already two-thirds of prison population. This bill would mean that these children would be trapped in the criminal justice system for their whole lives.

Some of the senators supporting this bill also oppose legislation requiring gun owners to keep their guns away from children. It seems the gun lobbies are stronger than children's rights advocates.

It seems we are more intent as a nation on protecting a wrongly interpreted Constitutional amendment than we are on protecting our own children.

It seems we are more intent on locking up our children than on saving them. If that's the case, more mothers are destined to cry.

(Write your senator at the U.S. Senate, Washington DC, 20510 or call (202)224-3121 to express concerns about the Violent and Repeat Juvenile Offender Act, S.10 bill.)

## Day-to-day racism as pernicious as apartheid

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Several weeks ago, while at home on a Sunday afternoon, I became quite ill. First, I experienced severe chills, then a blazing

fever. My wife Leith took my temperature. When she saw that my temperature was 104 degrees and rising, she insisted that we go to the emergency room at a nearby hospital.

Like a typical male, I argued against it. I had simply a bad case of the flu, I reasoned. But Leith wouldn't take "no" for an answer.

With the unique determination that black women possess, she forced me up and out the apartment door. We walked to the corner of Broadway and 120th Street in Manhattan and stood at the corner to hail a taxi going uptown.

The first empty yellow cab that came by started slowing down. But when the taxi driver saw that the potential patrons were African-Americans, he stepped on the gas and drove passed us. A second taxi, following closely behind, did the same.

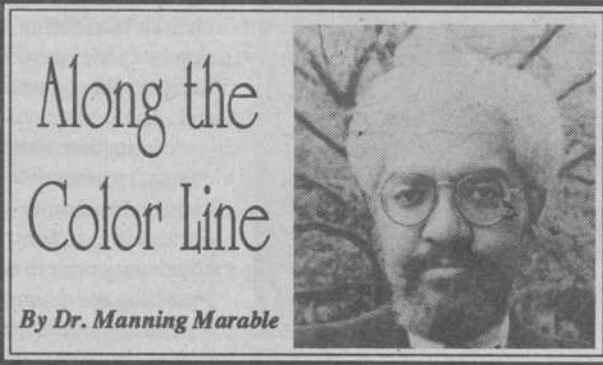
Meanwhile, my fever had increased, and it was more difficult for me to think clearly. My wife sensed this and with greater urgency tried to get a taxi.

In the next five minutes, four more taxis traveled uptown on Broadway, coming down the hill toward us. But all four stopped before reaching us, making U-turns in the center of the street, then rapidly proceeding downtown in the opposite direction.

Finally, a seventh taxi came down the hill. The driver turned on his blinker and slowed to a halt. Getting inside, we finally made our way to the hospital.

We later learned that I had come down with a severe bacterial infection, which had caused a 105-degree fever. My wife's decision to force me to go the hospital probably had saved my life. After six days, I was well enough to return home.

I tell this story because it represents the fundamental challenge to uprooting racism in American society. New York City has passed



Along the Color Line

By Dr. Manning Marable

various local laws making it illegal for taxicabs to refuse to pick up people on the basis of race. It is illegal for taxi drivers to refuse to travel to specific neighborhoods

in the city. Nevertheless, in the real world of white racism, black people are expendable.

Racism is often compared with lynching, police brutality and the disparate death penalty sentencing. Sometimes we think about racism as the overt consequences of discrimination, such as political disfranchisement and the denial of access to public accommodations.

But far more pervasive and pernicious is what might be termed "day-to-day racism," the thousands of acts of omission, avoidance and exclusion black people face regularly. The discriminatory behaviors and practices may not have behind them the sanction of law, but are just as powerful as the overt racism of apartheid or the Jim Crow South of a generation ago.

There are, in effect, two parallel racial universes within American society, in which blacks and whites may speak the same language, are theoretically governed by the same laws, but experience reality in fundamentally different ways.

In practical terms, day-to-day racism means that we die sooner on average and in disproportionately higher numbers than our white counterparts.

Think about health care alone. How many black women and men who urgently require emergency hospitalization die unnecessarily because they don't have immediate access to transportation? How many black women will die in childbirth needlessly because of substandard health services or public health care in their communities?

We know that during this year, about half-a-million Americans will go to emergency rooms in hospitals and will be turned away because they lack medical insurance. When health care access is determined by profitability, poor people and racial minorities lose out.

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### Carl Rowan's Commentary

## Journalists' wordplay demonizes the affirmative action concept

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

A while ago, I indicted my own profession while speaking at commencement ceremonies for Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

I told the proud young men and women how they will soon, as journalist, be able to turn noble endeavors into social catastrophes — just by manipulation of a few words.

I told them how, by using the words "race preference" to describe affirmative action programs, the media has transformed laudable efforts to right past wrongs into something that sounds despicably "un-American."

I could speak boldly on the subject because I would not have been invited to Columbia to speak and to receive this journalism school's highest honor had it not been for affirmative action.

Fifty years ago, having failed to get into Columbia, I earned my master's in journalism from the University of Minnesota — at a time when only a handful of mainstream newspapers would hire a black reporter. Desperate for a job, I applied at the nearest likely place, the *Minneapolis Tribune*.

Fortunately, publisher John Cowles, a man of great social conscience and bravery, had decided that his lily-white news staff didn't reflect society.

Cowles' "affirmative action" gave me a measure of justice.

By demonizing "racial preferences,"



CARL ROWAN

newspapers change attitudes, in turn hurting many promising youngsters. Journalist seem to be giving credence to efforts by the powers-that-be to stunt, stifle and stymie affirmative action.

It is fitting that a day after my speech at Columbia, the nation learned the damage wrought on California by

Proposition 209, the ballot initiative that slams the door of admission on blacks and Hispanics applying to colleges in the respected University of California system.

At Berkeley, the freshman class of 3,600 this fall will include just 98 blacks, compared with 260 last fall. The number of Hispanics will drop from 492 to 264. Berkeley's chancellor, Robert M. Berdahl, calls the situation "grim."

UCLA will have just 131 black freshmen in a class of 4,267 this fall, compared with 219 last year. The Hispanic enrollment will fall from 603 to 458. Vice chancellor, Theodore R. Mitchell says that if this trend continues "the diversity of our campus will be seriously compromised and with it, our greatness."

I think the Columbia grads saw the damage wordplay can have, especially when we, as journalists, use loaded negative phrases to describe actions that are meant to be positive and programs that are complicated but fair.

But I left asking myself: How many of them will remember not to fall into the same trap?