

COMMENTARY

Rising tide of hate crimes threatens racial meltdown

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The lynching of James Byrd, Jr., an African-American, by three alleged White supremacists near Jasper, Texas shocked many Americans. But equally shocking is the indifference of many federal and state officials toward racially-motivated hate crimes.

Even as President Clinton swore that the guilty would be brought to justice and the sheriff in Jasper admitted that the crime appeared to be racially-motivated, the FBI issued a tepid statement promising an "investigation" to determine if Byrd's civil rights were violated.

But it requires no investigation to determine that since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, hate groups like the Aryan Nation, Skinheads and the Ku Klux Klan have grown in number and are more dangerous than ever.

At last count, there were 858 identifiable paramilitary groups operating in the 50 states. In 1996, they spent an estimated \$100 million on explosives manuals, weapons and survival

gear. They held "preparedness expos" in six cities, drawing thousands of participants, visitors and exhibitors. These groups have at least 250 web sites, chat rooms and mailing lists which are jammed with racist articles, slogans, messages and letters.

In a six-month period from July 1996, the Imperial Klan, one of several splinter Klan factions, received more than 70,000 hits on their web site.

There were more than 30 documented hate crime murders in 1995 and 1996. In 1997, the violent trend continued with well-publicized attacks on African-Americans in Denver and several other cities.

While African-Americans remain the No. 1 targets and are the victims of the most violent attacks, Latinos, Asians, gays and Jews are also frequently victimized.

These numbers almost certainly don't reflect the true magnitude of their crimes. Four out of five victims of hate crimes do not report them because they are too fearful or think police and

local officials will do little or nothing to protect them. There's a good reason for their worry.

The response to hate crimes varies widely from state to state, city to city and police agency to police agency. Under the Hate Crimes Act only 32 states submitted any data to the FBI on hate crimes in 1995, and only 17 states require reporting and recording of hate crimes separate from the requirements of the federal statute. Only 35 percent of all police agencies have hate crime task force units or specific procedures for dealing with these crimes.

And eight states still have no laws targeting racially motivated hate crimes. Some states allow hate violence to be prosecuted as "stand alone" crimes, meaning the acts themselves can be punished, while other states permit the prosecution of hate crimes only if they are committed in conjunction with another crime. Also, only a handful of states permit judges to increase penalties when racial bias is proven as the motive for the crime.

While the number of racial hate crimes are

much smaller than the millions of "common" crimes in America, the social and political damage they wreak is much greater.

When individuals are victimized solely because of their race, religion or sexual preference this deepens fears and frustration and reinforces "us vs. them" divisions between many Americans, thus increasing the danger of a racial explosion.

Hopefully, the shock of the Texas lynching will force Clinton and law enforcement officials to propose tougher statutes and urge speedier arrests and prosecutions of violent hate mongers, and prod states dragging their feet or refusing to monitor hate crimes to stiffen penalties and require all law enforcement agencies to make timely reports and compile accurate figures on hate crimes to the FBI.

The response of federal and state officials to hate crimes is a matter of life and death; just ask the family of the late James Byrd, Jr.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is the author of *The Crisis in Black and Black*.

Black community still getting 'pimped' by the game

By Davey 'D'
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It's ironic that so many of us walk around and proudly proclaim how much game we got. Everyone is some sort of playa, hustler, baller, mack daddy and pimp.

Oh yes, we honor and revere the pimp in our community. He's the suave, debonair, smooth talking brotha who is always in control of his situation.

I say all this because I'm watching with great dismay how more young people are

characterizing themselves as Pimps and Playas. Everybody has got a tight game. Recently I saw just how tight the game was. The 13th version of the Air Jordan basketball shoe came out and a few hundred folks showed up before the Foot Locker around my block opened up.

Everyone wanted to shell out nearly \$200 for these "limited edition" basketball shoes. The same shoes that kids are getting stuck up, beat up and robbed for. The same shoes that seemed to be disproportionately marketed to the Black community.

There were no long lines in the neighboring suburbs. Nonetheless, according to an Oakland newspaper, the new Air Jordans sold out in less than three hours.

Let's overlook the fact that Nike managed to get a whole bunch of us to pay four to five times as much as it cost to make the sneaker. And let's overlook the fact that you had all these people lined up bright and early on a Saturday morning to get some new Air Jordans, yet the week before we could hardly get any of these folks to line up to cast a ballot at the voting booth.

Let's overlook the fact that we had all these parents who showed up with their youngsters to purchase these \$200 shoes, yet we can't get the majority of them to show up at any open classrooms, PTA meetings or any other educational type summit.

I started off by using the analogy of Pimps and Playas because I wanted to point out how we as a community are allowing ourselves to get pimped. This strategy is being used by shoe manufacturers to influence the young and

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Carl Rowan's Commentary

Lewinsky's new legal team to add spice to Zippergate

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Now that Monica Lewinsky has new lawyers, she is once again the key to a possible towering crisis of the presidency.

Will she save herself from criminal prosecution for swearing falsely that she did not have sexual relations with President Clinton by cutting an immunity deal with special prosecutor Kenneth Starr and then testifying that she was the president's lover? Or will she defy Starr and protect the president by saying that she was just boasting girlishly and untruthfully when she was tape-recorded telling erstwhile friend Linda Tripp and apparently FBI agents that she engaged in sex with Clinton?

Her new lawyers might tell her she cannot take the latter line because they fear Starr has enough other evidence, circumstantial or whatever, to make a jury believe that both Lewinsky and Clinton are liars who have tried to obstruct justice. But these lawyers know that the implications are monumental if she denounces the court affidavit in which she denied having a sexual affair with the president.

Were Lewinsky to testify that she did have sex with Clinton, and in effect say that the president lied in his under-oath statement in the Paula Jones case, we will have a major crisis in the presidency. There is now no question that Starr will move ruthlessly for


impeachment, an indictment, or whatever he thinks will wrest the presidency from Clinton.

It is my view that Congress will never impeach Clinton without direct testimony from Lewinsky that he lied about their relationship and asked her to lie. Even if Monica so testifies, impeachment might still be impossible because almost all Democrats and some Republicans find the effort to unseat a president on what is fundamentally a sex charge repugnant.

One can even reasonably doubt that a jury would convict Lewinsky were she to refuse a Starr deal and get indicted. Too many potential jurors in Washington believe Starr is abusing Lewinsky in a brazen politically-motivated attempt to overthrow Clinton.

But everything about this bitter case will change if and when Monica testifies. The president has kept his lips sealed in the face of great media criticism because his lawyers have convinced him that it would be foolhardy for him to say anything until he knows what Lewinsky will do and say.

The former White House intern is in a terrible bind, with prison up one path and total humiliation up the other. But at least she now has two very savvy lawyers. It will be more than fascinating to see how they manage to protect her without throwing Clinton and his friends into the clutches of Kenneth Starr.



CARL ROWAN

Disabled minorities face tough odds in workplace

Special to Sentinel-Voice

When Ralph Ellison's book, *The Invisible Man*, was published some 50 or so years ago, it created an uproar because it pointed to the

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



fact that millions of African-Americans were all but invisible to the larger society. A half a century later there is an invisible group of people in our society, including in communities of color, but there is no hard-hitting novel to tell their story. The invisible people are those with disabilities.

Eight years ago the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed and went into effect, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability. And while it has made a significant difference in the lives of many people, the 54 million Americans with disabilities still face all kinds of discrimination.

Speaking in California a few weeks ago, I told the story of a federal judge whose mother had taught him an important lesson as a child growing up in the South. When his mother saw busses passing by an elderly black woman at the bus stop in front of their house, his mother went and stood with the black woman so that the bus would stop. A few days ago, I received a note from a woman in a wheelchair who was attending that meeting and who shared her own similar experiences today. Often she has to get a friend or colleague to stand with her at the bus stop to

ensure that the bus will stop for her. Not stopping is illegal, but it still happens.

Not surprisingly, discrimination against people of color has

crept into the equation. About half of working age Americans with disabilities are employed and only one-fourth with severe disabilities hold a job. People of color with disabilities face double or triple jeopardy when it comes to employment. Almost three-fourths of African-Americans and more than half of Hispanics with disabilities are unemployed. The tragedy is that most disabled people are capable of working.

In addition, people of color with disabilities are less likely to receive rehabilitation services, and educational opportunities are less available and affordable to them. Transportation and housing for people with disabilities in disadvantaged communities is limited at best. There are fewer mentors and role models for people of color with disabilities and mainstream job coaching, on-the-job training and internships are less frequently available to them.

Finally, some of the organizations designing programs for the employment of persons with disabilities do not clearly understand the cultural differences in communities of color and thus, have not done the best job in serving people of

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