

Our View

Race healing is moving with turtle-like quickness

Nearly 60 percent of American adults say the race picture has gotten rosier since civil rights champion Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated 30 years ago, according to the Marist Institute of Public Opinion.

But within that same poll is a more telling statistic: 63 percent of blacks think the pace of improving race relations is trudging along. The pace is too slow.

Gains have been made in every facet of African-American life, except social equality. The black middle class is one of the fastest growing populations, yet many have to work twice as hard for equal pay; there are more black millionaires than ever before, yet we can't crack the ceiling of top management in major companies; more blacks are graduating from college and advancing to higher degrees, but many university regent boards are lily-white; blacks are delving into entrepreneurship at a record clip; yet banks, and even Congress, refuse to level the playing fields for contracts. It seems there's a "yea" for every "nea."

We're great enough to lead America's military — Colin Powell, former Joint Chiefs of Staff, Togo West, present Secretary of the Army — but we're inhuman enough to be chained to the back of a pickup truck and dragged two-and-a-half miles until our limbs are severed from our bodies and torso shredded — Rest in peace James Byrd Jr. The pace is too slow.

Even President Clinton's much-ballyhoed race initiative hasn't been able to jumpstart healing process. After a year of town hall meetings and forums, it recently closed up shop. It's quiet exit will be followed by a report which will likely repeat admonitions made during the civil rights struggle: everyone deserves equal rights; judge people by their character not color, the best worker should get the job; respect each other. All the banter about what needs to be done never seems to be followed by action, thus, the pace is slowed.

The pace isn't helped by a government, in particular a Congress, that rails against affirmative action — it's been repealed in the University of California system and at least 13 other states are pondering limits on or abolishing preferences — or threatens to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts which supplies federal funds to countless mentor, after-school, recreational and life skills programs. It's no secret many minorities frequent these programs.

Camille Cosby, whose son Ennis was murdered last year by Mikhail Markhasev, wrote in a letter to the editor in *USA Today* this week that America cultivated in the 19-year-old's hatred for blacks. She talked of how the Voting Rights Act of 1965 expires in 2007, giving Congress the power to decide whether blacks vote; of the presidents who owned slaves; of blacks subjected to cruel experiments; of the risk of being black.

To be able to say that it's a risk being black hints that the pace is moving too slow, or not at all.

THE AVAILABILITY OF GUNS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE HIGH RATE OF GUN-RELATED VIOLENCE IN AMERICA.



Human rights in America: The Leonard Peltier case

America shouldn't thumb its nose at China, abuse abounds here

Special to Sentinel-Voice

It's ironic that at the very time so much attention is being placed on President Clinton's trip to China and the Chinese government's denial of human rights, one of the U.S. government's political prisoners is quietly suffering in his cell.

Amnesty International, the human rights group, defines a political prisoner as "any prisoner whose case has a significant political element..." If any case fits that definition, it is the case of Leonard Peltier.

Peltier is a Native American who, as one of the leaders of the American Indian Movement in the 1970's, was targeted by the FBI's infamous COINTELPRO operation.

Peltier was jailed 22 years ago for killing two FBI agents during a shootout on a South Dakota reservation. He was on the reservation as part of a delegation from AIM that had been summoned by local leaders after a period of clashes with federal agents.

The two men tried with him were both acquitted on the grounds that they acted in self defense. Peltier claims to have been framed and even prosecutors admitted they could not prove he fired the fatal bullet. He was convicted by circumstantial evidence and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences.

According to the FBI's own documents, Peltier was singled out by the FBI.

Believing he had no chance

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



of a fair trial, Peltier left the country and went to Canada, seeking asylum. While he was there, the U.S. government presented an affidavit signed by a Native American woman who claimed she had seen the murders. She later recanted and admitted that she had never seen Peltier in her life.

Since his conviction, Peltier has appealed his case four times, and although the court of appeals found that previous trials had been riddled with misconduct and improprieties, it refused to grant a new trial.

Peltier was again denied parole in early May. His lawyers were not allowed to speak during this hearing and Peltier reported that parole board members indicated that the government can't prove who is responsible for the agents' deaths, but someone has to pay for them and that one of the agent's widows wants Peltier to die in prison. He was told he would not have another parole hearing until 2008.

The most alarming turn of events in the Peltier case is his continuing mistreatment by federal prison officials.

In the Marion Federal Prison he was allegedly

tortured, and in the Springfield Federal Medical Center in Missouri he received poor, even malicious medical treatment for a maxilla-facial jaw problem.

After the surgery he suffered from complications and in the two years since, he has experienced excruciating pain.

In addition, he received questionable radiation treatment which at least one independent physician says is not normally used for correcting his type of problem.

Peltier can't open his mouth more than eight millimeters wide and is unable to chew his food or clean his teeth. He has an abscess which

could break and spread throughout his body. And in the cruelest of human rights abuses, a renowned maxilla-facial surgeon at Mayo Clinic has offered to treat Peltier but prison officials have denied his request.

According to our own laws, if prison medical units are unable to care for a prisoner, he has the right to outside care. Peltier is being denied that right.

The United States has no right to take China or anyone else to task for human rights abuses as long as Leonard Peltier remains imprisoned and denied the right to medical care. We ought to be ashamed.

(NOTE: You can write and ask for Leonard Peltier to receive treatment at the Mayo Clinic and to be released. Address mail to Kathleen Hawk, Director, Bureau of Prisons; 320 First St., Washington, D.C. 20534, or call (202) 514-6878. Send a copy of your letter to President Clinton.)

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Telephone (702) 380-8100
Fax (702) 380-8102

Contributing Writers:
Loretta Arrington
Kim Bailey
Lee Bloom
Lee Brown
Sonya Douglas
Sandra Dee Fleming
Sharon Savage
John Stephens III
Fred T. Snyder
Yvette Zmaila
Photographers:
John Broussard
Randy Merritt

Ramon Savoy, *Publisher-Editor*
Lynnette Sawyer, *General Manager*
Marcello Sawyer, *Copy Editor*
Deborah Kohen, *Staff Writer*
Don Snook, *Graphics*
Ed & Betty Brown, *Founders*

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