

COMMENTARY

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Even Thomas Jefferson couldn't escape Hyde's omnipotence

Special to Sentinel-Voice

This is an urgent call for the good and decent people of America to join me in demanding the posthumous impeachment of Thomas Jefferson.



CARL ROWAN

DNA testing now tells us beyond doubt that our third president made a slave woman, Dashing Sally Hemings, his concubine, and through either force or consent, fathered at least one child by her.

The articles of impeachment are clear:

1) Jefferson committed a high offense to public morals and showed he was unfit to be president when he bedded down outside wedlock with not just any slave, but with the half-sister of his wife, Martha, to whom he had pledged eternal love. And he lied by indirectly denying his affair with Hemings when, in 1805, the Massachusetts State Legislature accused him of this sexual outrage during a mock impeachment trial.

Part of any impeachment proceeding must be a House inquiry as to whether Jefferson committed statutory rape by fornicating with Sally after bringing her to Paris where he was ambassador when Hemings was about 13. She came home from Paris pregnant when she was 15 or 16.

2) Jefferson trampled on the hallowed American "rule of law" that he was sworn to defend and uphold when he repeatedly violated Virginia's laws forbidding sexual intercourse between a Caucasian and a person of African descent. So rigid was Virginia on this subject that it was not until June 12, 1967, that Chief Justice Earl Warren spoke for an unanimous U.S. Supreme Court in *Loving v. Virginia* declaring that Virginia's laws punishing

those who engaged in miscegenation or entered interracial marriages violated both the due process and equal protection clauses of the 14th Amendment.

3) Jefferson, the sphinx, in fact deceived the American people when he first decried slavery, but later said slavery had to be continued in order to

prevent miscegenation between whites and blacks who, he said more and more in his later years, were inherently inferior. Clearly we ought to dishonor a man who preached against interracial sex while secretly engaging in it. Otherwise, what will our children make of this hypocrisy?

4) Jefferson abused the powers of the presidency by using them to prevent his detractors from learning the whole truth about his illicit sexual adventures. Without obvious abuses, no president of this time could have hidden what was widely called "wenching."

We who think the president must be a role model for our children cannot blink an eye at the immoralities of Thomas Jefferson on grounds that he has become an American icon. He got his celebrated status through false pretenses. So we have a constitutional duty to expose him for what he was, no matter the consequences for his legacy.

I know that impeaching Jefferson will be an onerous task, given his now-exalted status. But as they say in the House Judiciary Committee, somebody has to do it. And who better to lead this inquisition charge than a brave legislator who personally knows something about illicit sexual encounters: the unflinching Judiciary chairman, Henry Hyde.

Remembering human rights day

By Bernice Powell Jackson

December 10 is celebrated around the world as Human Rights Day. It is a day set aside to remember the importance of basic human rights, to lift up the importance of these basic human freedoms which so many of us take for granted: the freedom to worship, the right to health and to a place to live and food to eat, the right not to be unjustly incarcerated or jailed solely because of our political beliefs. While Human Rights Day is celebrated here in the U.S., we frequently don't think it's a problem which applies to us, but we must look closer to find the truth.

A closer examination will show that the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, with a record 1.7 million prisoners. Nearly 80,000 of these are women. These numbers have grown astronomically, largely due to mandatory minimum sentencing on drug charges. A recent Boston Globe study found that 84% of those serving such sentences are first time offenders. In other words, a law which was intended to catch the big fish in the drug world is only catching the minnows.

Meanwhile, the use of the death penalty is growing, including the execution of juveniles and the mentally retarded and mentally ill. Many prisoners are housed in vastly overcrowded situations and often find themselves the victims of violence while in prison, sometimes at the hands of other inmates, sometimes by guards. In addition, there are over 100 political prisoners, people identified as being incarcerated because of their political beliefs, in U.S. prisons.

Such human rights violations in the U.S. are so real that the international human rights organization Amnesty International is focusing its attention on U.S. violations in 1999. It has already been monitoring police brutality, prison conditions, the death penalty and the U.S. treatment of people seeking

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By Bernice Powell Jackson



political asylum. Amnesty International is also urging the U.S. to ratify the international treaty called the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to better monitor its foreign sales of weapons.

Amnesty International, which impartially monitors human rights all over the world, is pointing to the double standards for human rights which the U.S. uses, often holding other nations accountable while not following international guidelines themselves. For instance, the U.S. has criticized China for the treatment of its prisoners, while prisoners in the U.S. often find themselves in overcrowded, violent prisons.

Or, using the death penalty on juveniles has been outlawed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is not done in most other nations. Indeed, the U.S., Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Pakistan and Nigeria are the only nations in the world which still execute juveniles. Moreover, the U.S. is the only so-called Western industrialized nation which continues to use the death penalty at all.

And then there is the double standard of immigration. For a nation which proudly points to its history as one of immigrant peoples, it is difficult for Amnesty and other human rights organizations to understand U.S. policy surrounding political asylum. It seems that as long as those seeking asylum were escaping from dictatorships in eastern Europe and Russia, they were welcome in the U.S. but now that more immigrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America are seeking asylum, the gates have quickly swung shut.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Gates claims 'Our View' off point on black representation

In response to the "Our View" column which appeared in the December 3, 1998 issue of the Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice, the value of Black representation on an Elected Board and/or any other governing body was called into question, to be specific, the article implies that my presence on the Clark County Board of Commissioners seems to be at issue.

Had the writer asked, he or she would have been assured that I have never opposed reapportionment. I have opposed reapportionment prior to the census which has been deemed the most accurate measuring tool for such acts as reapportionment. No other measuring tool would provide accurate data needed to determine bound-

aries. Anything other than that would be a tremendous and unnecessary financial burden on taxpayers.

I ask you to consider that historically, it has long been argued, battles have been fought and lives have been lost over the issue of representation on governing boards by persons who reflect the make-up of the population to be served. Let's not forget the ever on going debate over representation for the residents of our nation's capital, the calling for statehood of Washington DC. The basic and obvious reasons for these debates and battles are simple, people with similar interest and make up, including race and gender to



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name two, are best able to ensure that specific interest and values are taken into consideration. To suggest that it does not make a difference in terms of who sits on these governing bodies is not only foolish, but short sighted and pure ignorance. Had African-Americans and Native Americans as well, participated in the founding of this country slavery would not have existed, if the Japanese Americans had had representation, those citizens would not have been taken from their homes, jobs and families and thrown into concentration camps here in their own country. It has been proven over and over again that America left to her own

devices is more than prone to unfairness.

The mere presence of a person of color would and does have a positive impact. If you look at other governments having lost their minority representation, those communities have suffered tremendous setbacks.

Since you raised the question of my accomplishments, I could provide a comprehensive list. If it weren't for my presence, involvement, dedication and commitment as a County Commissioner, this list would be bleak. Finally, "Our View" is a slap in the face to all past, present and future African-American elected officials! Yvonne Atkinson Gates Clark County Commissioner District D

Family

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representatives and organizations must flex their political muscle before the next election comes around.

One place to start is Washington state, which just passed Initiative 200, another of these noxious anti-affirmative action measures, which bans considering race in admissions, employment and contracting decisions by officials of public institutions and agencies.

We must make it quite clear that these measures don't promote fairness; they promote exclusion.

The precipitous declines this year in the enrollment of black and Hispanic students in seven of the eight universities of the University of California show that unmistakably. That's why American corporations are pressing ahead with efforts, including affirmative action, to increase diversity. They know that's where their workforce and their markets are headed.

Unfortunately, Washington state is likely going to repeat California's lesson, and feel the same shock waves: at its 37,500-student University of Washington, in Seattle, where today less than 9 percent of the students are black, Hispanic and American Indian; and in its state contracting, where businesses owned by blacks, Hispanics, and white women are going to be shut out of opportunity-again. These are costs the American social fabric-the American "family"-can't afford to bear.