

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Despite what detractors say, new century exciting

Prince sure has created a commotion. But when the high-heeled one who is now bears a monogram moniker recorded the song "1999," he probably didn't expect the world to be in the state it is. And depending on who you talk to, these are the best of times and the worst of times. Some even say these are the end times.

America is in the midst of only the republic's second impeachment proceeding in 130 years. And while the Senate let Andrew Jackson off the hook by one vote, a partisan Republican party seems hell-bent on ensuring that William Jefferson Clinton gets the boot for trying to conceal his marital infidelity with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

Mother Nature's year-round sparring match with the earth has buffeted millennialists' predictions that the year 2000 equals doom. From floods and earthquakes in Japan to devastating mudslides in China to thousands left dead and scores more left homeless in Central America because of Hurricane Mitch to bone-chilling cold that even has warm-blooded Russians ducking for cover, the earthly maladies continue to mount.

Then there are the man-made ills, in particular, wars. The Palestinians and Israeli's continue to teeter on the brink of peace only to have their efforts rebuffed by outbreaks of violence or hard-liners on each side threatening political retribution or worse if top officials acquiesce. Ditto for the shaky peace in Northern Ireland. Civil war wracks many pockets of Africa. North Korea, a communist country allied with China, has joined other nations with nuclear capabilities, and Bosnia still sticks out as a sore thumb for U.S. foreign policy. And let's not forget Saddam.

Speaking of pesky problems, stories about the Y2K computer problem — in which computers will not recognize the triple 0s, throwing everything out of wack — are hitting newspapers almost daily.

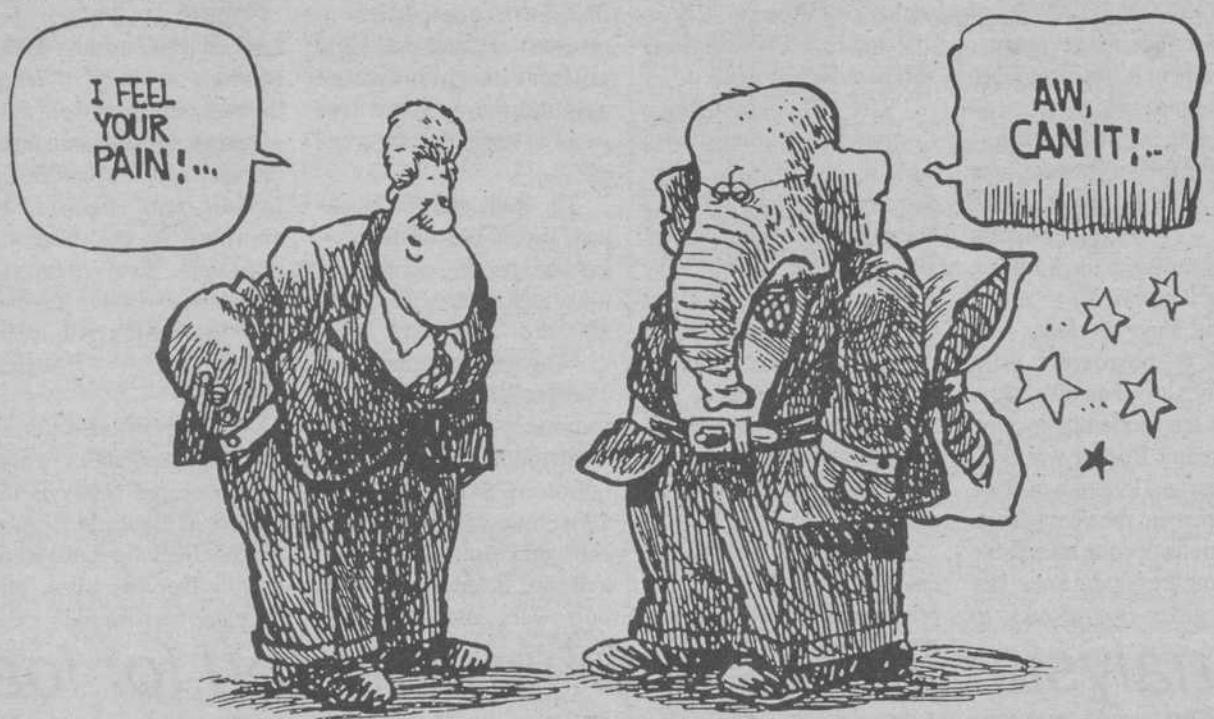
Now the good news: For every problem, there seems to be something to cheer about. This is especially important for blacks.

We should not stop fighting to change our communities and the world because of predictions about what the new millennium holds. We should champion diversity in the nation's corporate boardrooms, continue pushing for economic reciprocity among ourselves and fairness from government when dealing with empowering minority entrepreneurs.

We should also take on new battles: targeting a justice system that discriminates and has helped the prison industry grow into a multi-billion industry built on the backs of Blacks, maximizing our political power to put a minority into the nation's highest office and moving from consumers to producers.

Indeed, the new millennium holds both peril and promise. We, in a great measure, will determine if it's feast or famine.

BRADKINS "THE PAINFUL TRUTH" 12/28/98



Driving while black police's noxious little secret

Special to Sentinel-Voice

For more than two years now, I've periodically written about the noxious police practice of using an alleged violation of the traffic laws to pull over African-American and Hispanic-American motorists — when the real motivation is really just the police officers' hunch that, because of the color of their skin, the motorists have done something wrong or are about to.

This practice has become so widespread and so notorious that it's acquired the tag, "Driving While Black."

The phrase may have a certain catchiness to it, but its undertone is one of a deep cynicism.

A recent study by the think tank, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that 81 percent of blacks and 83 percent of Hispanics believe the police "are much more likely to harass and discriminate against blacks than against whites."

You can be sure that now, in the midst of one of the year's busiest driving seasons, more examples of "Driving While Black" will be circulating within black and Hispanic communities — further intensifying the already considerable mistrust with which many within them view law enforcement.

Some police officials defend the practice. They argue that rather than being racist, or even racial; it's just good police work.

To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price
President
National Urban League



They say that more blacks and Hispanics get stopped because of the disproportionate involvement of blacks and Hispanics in so-called street crime generally and particularly in low-level drug trafficking.

They argue a police officer's or state trooper's "hunch" in stopping black and Hispanic motorists is likely to pay off more often than stopping white motorists.

(The Driving While Black controversy also has a pedestrian counterpart, if you will. A skeptical Supreme Court this month heard the appeal of a Illinois court ruling barring an "anti-gang loitering" law imposed by the Chicago City Council that was implemented primarily in black and Hispanic neighborhoods. Its advocates said it deterred crime. Moreover, they say it's not only unconstitutional, but also threatens young black and Hispanic males with wholly unjustified actions by police officers.)

But, as Toledo University law professor David A. Harris has written, this notion

contains a noxious flaw. It is that the police "are targeting all African-Americans because some of them are criminals. Under this view, all black citizens become probable criminals — suspects the minute they venture out of their homes."

As Prof. Harris shows, the pretense that such laws are race-neutral, and not a form of racial profiling, can't stand scrutiny.

Already, limited studies in several different areas of the country have shown that police stop black motorists at four to five times their proportion of drivers on those roads — but find contraband

in their vehicles at rates lower than or equal to that for white motorists who are stopped.

They are part of the body of evidence that cries out for a proper response.

That was underscored in dramatic fashion earlier this month when a Federal judge in Boston reduced the gun-possession sentence of a black defendant.

The judge said she was overruling federal sentencing guidelines because the man's long arrest record — which helps determine a defendant's sentence — had been inflated by arrests for minor traffic offenses that raised "deep concerns about racial disparity."

We and numerous others have long called for a federal study of the "Driving While Black" issue. Earlier this year Representative John Conyers Jr. successfully led the legislative push for the effort on Capitol Hill.

Now, that study is getting under way.

Attorney General Janet
(See Driving, Page 11)

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