

COMMENTARY

# Rosa Parks deserves congressional commendation

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

The end of February and the beginning of March is a very special time of the year for me. It is the intersection point between Black History Month and Women's History Month.

As an African-American woman, I always feel a special sense of awe at the many contributions to history of these two parts of myself.

And if there is one African-American woman whom I would choose to honor this year, it would be Rosa Parks.

As the "mother" of the civil rights movement and as a woman who single-handedly and unpretentiously changed the history of this nation, Parks is one of my

role models, as she is for so many others. This year there is a way we can all honor this special woman.

Parks has been nominated to receive the Congressional Gold Medal by Indiana Congresswoman Julia Carson. Carson has introduced a bill to honor Parks.

With more than 120 co-sponsors, the bill is on its way to passing, but she needs an additional 100 or so congressional sponsors in order to by-pass a time-consuming hearing and committee process.

With more than half of the Congress co-sponsoring the bill, it could receive a shortcut and be quickly passed into

## Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



law. Parks, the quiet, unassuming seamstress who refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, propelled a young, inexperienced and new-to-Montgomery Martin Luther King, Jr. into local, and later national civil rights prominence.

Because Parks was a well-

respected, church-going member of the community, she received the immediate support of Montgomery's black community, which nearly boycotted that city's bus system several times before.

As secretary of the local NAACP, she was known as a community leader.

By refusing to accept this

personal indignity one more time, she set off a chain reaction that spread beyond and the South and all around the world.

Parks is often mistakenly quoted as saying that her feet were just tired that day. In her book, she says that her feet weren't tired, but that her pride and sense of personal self-worth were and that is what made her resist.

Not only was she arrested that day, but she and her husband ultimately lost their jobs in Montgomery and were forced to relocate to Detroit. Not long after arriving there she began to work for Congressman John Conyers, where she worked until she retired a few years ago.

Parks is now 86 and deserves the Congressional Gold Medal.

She deserves the gratitude of this whole nation.

Her story is one that all communities in our nation should tell proudly. It is a story of how one person, not elected to any public office, not in the public limelight, not a part of the "power structure" can make a difference just by standing up for what is right.

Now it's our turn to stand up for what is right by awarding Parks this special honor.

Those interested can call their congresspersons (202) 224-3121 and ask them to support HR 573.

## Carl Rowan's Commentary

### Impeachment debacle over, lingering effects worrisome

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

Well, the filthy little soap opera has ended, and William Jefferson Clinton is still our president and commander in chief.

Except that our moral-political version of a new American civil war didn't really end. And it won't end for a generation or more.



CARL ROWAN

The misery and the bloodletting cannot end as long as Democrats scramble for a censure resolution, or some other official way to say "unconscionable," "indefensible," "scurrilous" or otherwise deplore Clinton's sexual behavior, which they have been telling us was "private" and none of our business.

This excruciating scandal cannot end as long as Republicans feel a need to prove that they pursued impeachment on legitimate legal and constitutional grounds and were not just chasing wildly venal dreams of a right-wing coup.

The poison of this long, salacious episode cannot be washed away as long as Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr has trials pending against Julie Hiatt Steele, Susan McDougal and Webster Hubbell, three people he thinks did not help enough in his campaign to destroy Clinton.

The venom will ooze from sick glands as long as there is the remotest chance that Starr will try to prosecute Clinton, his secretary Betty Currie or his friend Vernon Jordan in criminal court.

And we shall have to regurgitate the bitterest morsels of this foul feast as the Congress and the nation writhe over whether

to extend the independent counsel statute when it expires June 30.

And the hatreds will be recharged as long as Linda Tripp feels a need to restore her reputation — or avoid conviction for illegal wire-tapping in Maryland — by contending that she was merely rescuing Monica

Lewinsky from a sexually sick Clinton, who was abusing her and throwing her away.

I see two things of major import that might mute the conflict:

- The Republican Party has sunk so low in public esteem that — to be a viable political institution in 2000 and beyond — it must show the American people that it can rise above its obsession with defeating Clinton and deal, at least, marginally with the needs and desires of the people.

- Despite all the talk about Clinton "walking, scot-free," this president has been critically wounded by this scandal. His high approval ratings do not ensure a legacy that any man would desire, so he must make a great mark over his last two years in office to escape the harshest judgment of history.

Clinton cannot do that without Republican cooperation, so he will fail if he devotes his brainpower and energy to schemes of revenge against House managers, or Democrats he thinks betrayed him, in the impeachment ordeal.

We can find some relief in the vote. But we are all in for more months, even years, that will test the mettle and the magnanimity of our hearts and souls.

## Myth of black deviancy perpetuating self-hate

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When a recent panel of Black scholars, writers and activists tackled the perennial issue "the crisis of the Black family," speaker after speaker quoted the familiar list of ills that plague African Americans.

They include: The high rate of drug and alcohol use, teen pregnancy, father (and mother) family absenteeism, gang violence, welfare dependency and poverty.

The mostly Black audience applauded and nodded dutifully at the torrid escalation of self-flagellation.

But the speakers and the audience were only re-sketching the standard portrait of Black life as a vast wasteland of violence, despair and chaos.

This picture was first painted in the 1950s and 1960s by corporate and government grant-seeking sociologists who branded Black neighborhoods cesspools of decay. They carved a growth industry out of studying "Black deviancy" and "the pathology of the ghetto."

By the 1990s a legion of pop scholars had put a new twist to ghetto pathology. They didn't just dissect it, they blamed Blacks for creating it.

It didn't take long for a parade of "Gangsta" rappers, Black novelists, essayists, poets, playwrights and filmmakers to cash in on these stereotypes.

They rapped, wrote and made films that claimed that life in today's Black communities is a survival test where people dodge bullets; go to funerals of loved ones killed by gangs; step over people lying in a drug or alcoholic stupor; hide from rapists and molesters; and despair over absentee or abusive fathers.

Discussing these ills has proven to be a sure ticket to tell-all talk shows, hefty advances from publishers, boosted record sales and secured movie deals.

Much of the media feeds these myths and half-truths with a near daily diet of crime-drug-gang-derelection stories and nurtures it with its tabloid obsession with sex, violence and depravity.

The true reality is that most Blacks don't live this kind of existence. During Black History Month, the Census Bureau released a comprehensive report that paints this picture of Black life in 1998:

- Nearly nine out of 10 African Americans, aged 25-29, are high school graduates, and 15 percent have college degrees. College enrollment among Blacks has soared 40 percent over a decade ago.

- The Black high school drop out rate is only marginally higher than that of non-Blacks. "African-American median income continues to grow, and the drop in poverty rates for African Americans accounts for 60 percent of the overall drop in poverty in America.

- Twenty percent of African Americans worked in management or the professions.

- The number of Black owned businesses leaped nearly 50 percent, and their gross receipts rose 63 percent between 1987-1992.

- Nearly 60 percent of African-American children under 18 live in a married-couple family.

Also, other government and private studies show that Blacks have lower rates of drug, alcohol and tobacco use than young Whites.

Even though inherent Black deviancy is mostly a myth, some Black leaders also play a numbers game to magnify the problem. They grab an occasional spot on news talk shows and shake a few dollars out of the fast disappearing number of liberals for their organizations.

But the doomsday scenario not only is wearing thin, it is self-defeating. Many Americans believe that the problems of the ghetto are self-made and insoluble.

Consequently, many politicians refuse to spend another nickel on job, welfare, health or education programs, oppose affirmative action and demand more police and prisons.

Some Blacks gain from trading in the myths and half-truths about themselves, but most lose. And, there's everything deviant about that.

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

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