

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Concern about youth violence in America overdue but needed

Led by Sen. Richard Bryan, a bipartisan contingent on Capitol Hill is pushing for the establishment of a National Youth Violence Commission in the wake of a recent massacre in a Colorado high school and deadly campus rampages dating back to 1997 in Kentucky, Mississippi, Oregon and Pennsylvania. The commission would be charged with "conducting a comprehensive factual study of incidents of youth violence to determine the root causes of such violence.

The commission would investigate a series of specific factors including the involvement and awareness of teachers, school administrators and parents in children's lives, trends in family relationships, alienation, peer pressure, availability of firearms, violence in the media, access to information on making explosives and more.

The 16-member commission would draw from the ranks of the Attorney General and Surgeon General's office, the departments of Health and Human Services and Education and people appointed by house leaders.

Make no mistake, work needs to be done to curb the scourge of violence gnawing away at a generation of American youth, but much of what this commission would likely find out is already known: Where there are jobs and recreational outlets, there is less crime, less drugs, less violence.

But to take the legs from out of the bureaucratic monster Bryan and his compadres would be to disallow them the chance to pontificate on what roads America needs to take to correct the passage of its youth and give them a chance to pat themselves on the back for at least outwardly trying to make inroads into the vexing problem of youth violence.

Problem is, too many politicians see the problem of youth violence from a white perspective. When intelligent young men and women from well-do-to suburban families grab fully automatic weapons, and explosives in the case of the Columbine high massacre, and gun down peers and school officials, the typical knee-jerk reaction is to cry wolf about the availability of guns - and there are too many guns in America - and attach the word "epidemic" to the problem. Columbine-type incidents are rare, but generate worldwide headlines. Inner-city violence isn't so newsworthy.

For years, minority youth have been trapped in a whirlwind of self-perpetuating violence and drug abuse. Instead of establishing a national commission on gangs and drugs, politicians responded with loitering laws that prevent three people in "known" gang areas from congregating. They created gang units, armed them to the teeth and taught them Gestapo tactics. They introduced the three-strikes law. They stiffened sentences for rock cocaine, which is typically used by minorities. They planted snitches in street organizations. They falsified crimes. They showed disdain for minority youth.

It's sad to say, but Columbines exist throughout America and it's even sadder that in the wake of that terrible slaughter discussion has yet to broach inner-city violence which has claimed thousands more lives.



Jackson deserves praise for humanitarian successes

Special to Sentinel-Voice

As Black Entertainment Television commentator Tavis Smiley said, he's four for four. Four times the Rev. Jesse Jackson has gone to U.S. "enemies" to seek the release of captives and four times he has succeeded. No Presidents, no diplomats, no soldiers have that record. Yet, he still doesn't get the respect, the accolades or the approval of the American people, the press or our leaders.

What's more, they can't understand how he succeeds every time.

Jesse's first release was back in 1984, when he went to Iraq to see about getting a U.S. pilot named Goodman released. The nation was amazed when he was released.

Then there were the less well-known releases of hundreds of men, women and children by Syria and both Cuban and non-Cuban prisoners by Fidel Castro, both negotiated by Jackson in the 1990's. Now, it's the release of the three American POW's by Serbian President Milosevic. Four for four.

And still no respect, only second-guessing and quick dismissals of the release by network commentators and newspaper columnists and editors. Only under-the-breath griping by diplomat official types. Only passing interest by the general public, all fueled by jealousy, by misunderstanding, by cynicism and yes, by racism.

Racism because the reality is that some Americans still

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



can't accept that African Americans are smart enough, saavy enough and sure enough to negotiate with world leaders for the release of hostages, political prisoners and POW's. It was true for Ralph Bunche, the African American who helped negotiate the peace in the 1950 Arab-Israeli dispute for which he won the Nobel Prize, but never won the acclamation by his own country, and it seems to be true for Jesse Jackson a half a century later.

And so the nay-sayers ask the question of whether Rev. Jackson was "used" by the other side or they ask if he didn't get in the way of the war. They ask if he doesn't realize that he's dealing with someone who may be charged with crimes against humanity or they criticize his style or question his motives.

Because of his race, these critics can't see that Jesse Jackson is one of the world's most astute politicians. He is able to speak comfortably with the world's leaders. He is able to discern the many layers of diplomatic conversation and the myriad positionings in complex negotiations. He is able to

keep confidences and most of all he is able to keep his eye singularly on his own mission, that of securing the release.

As a two-time presidential candidate, as a clergyman, as a civil rights leader and as a black man in America, Jesse Jackson has had to use these skills over and over again so it should be no surprise that he is a consummate diplomat. Yet, because of his race, many of these critics can't see that Jesse Jackson is no naive novice, no bull in the china shop.

But the most important factor in Jesse Jackson's diplomatic successes is the one to which the commentators and most

public officials seem to be totally blind. It's the faith factor. It's the power of prayer and the power of God. On each of his trips, Rev. Jackson has reached down deeply into his faith in God in order to secure the releases.

On each of his trips Rev. Jackson has taken an inter-faith group with him to pray — to pray for the hostages, to pray for the hostage-keepers, to pray for peace and yes, to pray for release.

In the end, it's been the faith factor which has ensured Rev. Jackson's success every time.

In the words of Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches and a member of the delegation to Serbia, "Miracles do happen."

Miracles do happen when we acknowledge the power of God. Miracles do happen when we drop our racism and our cynicism and allow God to use whom God chooses to effect release of the captives (See Jackson, Page 16)

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Telephone (702) 380-8100
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Contributing Writers:
Loretta Arrington
Lee Brown
Sandra Dee Fleming
Tammy McMahan
Sharon Savage
John T. Stephens III
Fred T. Snyder

Photographers:
John Broussard
Jonathan Olsen

Ramon Savoy, Publisher-Editor
Lynnette Sawyer, General Manager
Dianna Saffold, Business Manager
Catisha Marsh, Associate Editor
Madeline Beckwith, Intern
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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