

COMMENTARY

Giving thanks to martyrs, freedom fighters, children

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Memorial Day, as I understand it, was originally designated as a day to remember those in the armed forces who died in the service of their country.

But through the years it has become a time when our nation honors the service men and women who died for our freedom and also a time when families remember those who have died from illness, from accidents, from tragedies.

It is a sacred time of thanksgiving and remembrance.

On this Memorial Day, then, I give thanks for all those service men and women of color who gave their lives for their country and had to endure the sting of racism even while serving in our armed forces.

For those African-Americans who served in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War and all the wars in

between, but who were never honored and acknowledged, I give thanks.

For those who were the Buffalo soldiers, who even though they fought in an unjust war against our native American brothers and sisters, were brave and loyal to their nation, I give thanks.

In this century, I give thanks for those African-American service men and women who had to get off the trains once they returned to the segregated states of the U.S. South, while watching German prisoners-of-war being treated better than they were.

For those who endured the indignities of segregated armed forces and whose bravery and competence was questioned solely because of their race, I give thanks.

I give thanks for Dory Miller and other black men who were forced to work only as cooks or valets in the Army

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



or Navy, but then who showed incredible courage when their ships or troops were under fire and for those black women who served in the Women's Army and Air Corps and put up with both the sexism and the racism and who endured racist epithets by the soldiers they nursed and whose bedpans they emptied.

Thanks go out to those Asian-American soldiers whose loyalty was questioned and those native American and Hispanic American soldiers who were discriminated against.

For the thousands of young men of color who served disproportionately in the Viet Nam War to those who were killed and those who still suffer, I give thanks.

And on this Memorial Day, I remember all the children who have died in the violence which engulfs our land.

I also remember the children in the inner cities who have died in drive-by shootings and in gang violence, the children who have been accidentally shot while playing with guns, the children in the suburbs who

have died in the shootings in the schools in Paducah, Ky., Pearl, Miss., Springfield, Ore., Jonesboro, Ark., Littleton, Colo. and Conyers, Ga., the children who have died at the hands of their own parents and those in their households.

I remember those of my ancestors who gave so much of themselves so that I might be where I am today.

My parents, my grandparents and those whose names I do not know. Those who sacrificed themselves in an oppressive system.

I thank those who endured the horrors of the Middle Passage and then the horrors of slavery for me.

I thank those who, though not biologically related to me, were beaten and lynched and murdered so that I might vote and I might be educated and I might thrive.

And I remember those who came on the boats from

China and Japan and Puerto Rico and nations around the world so that they could make a better life for their children and who endured discrimination and segregation, ridicule and hatred, concentration camps and prisons.

I remember those who were the original people of this nation, who have survived despite the wars, the imprisonments, losing their homes and their culture.

All of these people have given something for each of us and I honor them.

On this Memorial Day, may we all take time to honor those who have given much. May we take time to remember the innocents and the warriors for justice.

And may we be strengthened by their memories and their stories to go forward into the 21st century.

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Culture, Hollywood, Constitution protecting culture of violence

Special to Sentinel-Voice

They say that hindsight is always 20/20. I say that without hindsight, a troubled past never becomes a teacher.

So it is proper to say in hindsight that the police in Littleton and Jefferson County, Colo., should have done something when Randy Brown, parent of a Columbine High School student, told them that another student, Eric Harris, had threatened the life of his son. He also reported that Harris was making pipe bombs.

Hindsight tells us that someone should have blown some whistles when Harris and Dylan Klebold, members of the "Trenchcoat Mafia," prepared as a school project a video showing a gang rampaging through a high school and killing all the "jocks."

It was Harris and Klebold who allegedly ran amok in the Columbine school, murdering 12 of their schoolmates and one teacher before killing themselves.

But foresight tells me that, even in the wake of this great tragedy, taking the steps necessary to ensure reasonable safety will be extremely difficult because they mean curtailing what many Americans think of as basic freedoms. These include the right to bear arms, freedom of speech, First Amendment rights of Hollywood and network producers, and the right not to be harassed by the police.

I expect that police did nothing a year and a half ago because they thought Brown's complaint was not solid enough for them to offend a "nice middle-class family" by hassling Harris.



CARL ROWAN

It is utterly reasonable to deny gun ownership to juveniles who have committed violent crimes, but our Congress has rejected such a law. The Clinton administration says it will try again to gain passage.

There ought to be a law decreeing that whoever sold or otherwise delivered the powerful guns to Harris and Klebold is an accessory to murder, but such individuals ought to be subject to harsh punishment even when weapons transferred illegally have not yet been used to kill anyone.

Surely, no author of our Constitution ever intended it to allow teen-agers to roam our streets with semi-automatic handguns and rifles. The gun zealots must yield to logic.

Those of us who live by and cherish the First Amendment are going to have to yield something to common sense when it comes to the Internet and the posting of sites that threaten lives or incite people to commit grotesque crimes.

I personally have no doubt that Hollywood and the television industry contribute mightily to a cult of violence in which it is viewed as manly and heroic to "waste" a foe.

It is not by chance that most big-money movies contain a maximum of blood, gore, bombs and general destruction. But since I don't want government to become a censor, I keep hoping that television and the movie industry will reform themselves. But does the profit imperative allow them to do that?

We Americans have some agonizing decisions to make.

Perpetual violence symptom of spiritually-starved nation

LaWanza Spears

Special to Sentinel-Voice

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he"

Proverbs 23:7

Children killing their parents, children killing their peers and children killing themselves. All are too familiar scenarios across this country. And the fact that psychiatrists, psychologists, politicians, and law enforcement agencies have become the foremost authorities on the plight of our youth does not paint a promising picture of our society's future.

The problem is not that little Johnnie gets teased by his peers because he's "different," or that Alex is depressed and angry because his father is an alcoholic and beats him during his drunken episodes. If we were honest with ourselves and each other, we would redefine "dysfunctional."

All of us have experienced some degree of misconduct or disorder in our journey through life: poverty, an absentee parent(s), physical, mental and sexual abuse; parental neglect, substance abuse, lack of communication or expectation; materialism, racist indoctrination, divorce, infidelity, teen pregnancy, etc. None of us are immune to the confusion and disorder that is sure to confront all of us at some point in our lives.

The problem is we don't know how to endure the teasing or manage the anger because we are spiritually malnourished.

Instead of the messages of hate, death and destruction that we digest on a daily basis through the news and our various sources of

"entertainment," we should be feeding on words of hope, love, peace and life.

I'm not dictating what music you should listen to or what kind of people you should associate with. Just be mindful of the elements that make up the majority of your diet. What we take in is exactly what's going to come out.

Life essentials can be extracted from not only education and real entertainment media, but also from prayer and reading the Bible or other religious texts.

Just think how different Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold would have been if someone would have pulled them to the side early on and taught them to love and accept themselves and others. They wouldn't have sought to identify with Hitler, and they wouldn't have let an inferiority complex drive them to murder.

There is a difference between a child who is teased but is spiritually fit and the one who is teased but is not. The fit child will be so full of love and peace that there will be no room to internalize negative feelings about him/herself or others.

The unfit child, however, will absorb the comments because he/she is too weak from digesting too much junk. In order to cure this malnutrition that is killing us, we have got to be as conscious about the health of our spiritual bodies as we are about our physical ones. Death and destruction have nothing to do with what is going on on the outside and everything to do with what's going on on the inside.

We accept letters to the editor

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