

COMMENTARY

Black women becoming new menace to society

Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Many area residents affectionately called her "Mom" and described her as sweet and harmless. She was a homeless, middle-aged, African-American woman who had become a familiar figure on the streets of mid-city Los Angeles.

These same residents shook their heads last week in puzzlement and outrage when "Mom" was gunned down by Los Angeles Police officers. Police claim they stopped to question her about a stolen shopping cart and they shot her when she threatened them with a screwdriver.

Their story was hotly disputed by witnesses who say that the officers shot "Mom" as she walked away. But, even if she did what

police said, how much of a threat was a middle-aged, diminutive woman? Couldn't the officers have fired a warning shot, radioed for help, or used non-lethal force such as a stun gun, tasers, rubber bullets, tear gas pellets, pepper spray, or bean bags to subdue her?

The question is: Was the slaying of "Mom" an aberration or is it just deadly business as usual for the LAPD?

This is the police department, that in the wake of the Rodney King beating, became the national poster agency for police abuse. A recent report from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission concluded that problems of abuse still plague the LAPD and L.A. County Sheriffs Department and recommended the appointment of

an independent prosecutor to investigate police abuse in the area.

Sadly, the slaying of "Mom" comes several months after the murder of Tyisha Miller, another African-American woman, by Riverside police officers. The number of African-American women shot under questionable circumstances by police officers in Los Angeles and Riverside has reached five in the past three years.

This unprecedented pattern of killings is a harsh reminder that for many in law enforcement, Black women are increasingly regarded as society's new "problem."

While much of the media has always stereotyped Black men as lazy, violent, sexual predators, black women are being typed much the same

way. The Miller case in Riverside was a classic example of this.

The city's major daily newspaper, the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, branded her as "aggressive," "assaultive," "a possible gang member" and "mistaken for a man." This heavy dose of racial and gender stereotypes about Black women rests solidly on these deeply engrained myths and have had deadly consequences: Image assault.

The image of the sexually immoral and physically aggressive Black woman puts her at risk in law and public policy. In many cases police, prosecutors and the courts ignore or lightly punish rape, sexual abuse and assaults against Black women.

Devalued lives: Black women are far more likely to

be raped, assaulted and murdered than non-Black women. They are far less likely to have the media treat crimes against them as seriously as crimes against white women.

The rape and murder of 7-year-old Sherrice Iverson at a Nevada casino in 1997 is another classic example. There were numerous features and cover stories in the major press on her white teen killer, but none were done on Iverson.

Prison: For the first time in American history Black women — in some states — are being imprisoned at nearly the same rate as white men. They are seven times more likely to be jailed than white women.

Homelessness: The killing of "Mom" spotlighted not only the issue of police abuse,

but also the crisis of homelessness among Black women.

African-Americans make up more than half of the homeless in America. And while the homeless receive much individual sympathy, that has not resulted in an increase in drug, alcohol, education and job training programs to help women such as "Mom" get off the streets.

No matter what conclusion police and investigators ultimately come to regarding the slaying of "Mom," Black women are still being viewed as deviant and violent. And as such, they will continue to be seen and treated by many in law enforcement as the new menace to society.

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

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Pennsylvania experiment highlights dilemma of ethics organ donations

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The most vexing issues of ethics faced by mankind seem to fall into the fields of medicine and science.

For example, suppose that you are one of the 64,000 Americans waiting to receive a new heart, liver, lung, kidney or pancreas. You have seen the waiting lists grow from a total of 56,716 at the end of 1997 to 64,423 at the end of 1998, so you fear that you may die before you become eligible for a precious organ, unless a lot more people decide to donate them.

Yes, you'd like very much to offer enough money to encourage someone to become a donor, but you would be violating a 1984 federal law. That's when Congress passed the National Organ Transplant Act declaring human organs to be a national resource and forbidding their sale "for any kind of payment."

But how does this make sense, you ask, when you know a few young men who have kept their bars supplied juicily with booze by periodically selling some of their blood? The feds decided that a person's blood supply regenerates handily, but he has only one or two of the vital organs to give away. Thus there is no real shortage of blood, but a paucity of organs that is so serious that the wealthy would buy all that are available if there were a free market in body parts. That would leave the sick poor



CARL ROWAN

in utter desperation.

But now comes the state of Pennsylvania with a proposed end run around the federal ban on rewards for organ donors. That state proposes to give a stipend of \$300 to a family to help finance the funeral of an organ donor. The money would not be paid directly to

the family, but to its funeral home.

A poll conducted eight years ago showed 48 percent of the American people in favor of some financial compensation for families of organ donors, with 42 percent opposed. A larger percentage almost certainly favors payment now that the shortage of organs is far greater and the waiting list is growing dramatically.

I think that the organ distribution agencies all over the nation might first try more aggressive educational programs than we have seen so far to encourage people to donate organs.

Beyond that, I think there are ways to permit compensation without making transplants so much a benefit for the wealthy that the poor are doomed to early deaths. I think that each state can set up panels to ensure that the transplant business is both ethical and fair.

Surely every other state will watch the Pennsylvania experiment intensely. And so will the 64,000 Americans who want desperately to see the organ supply enhanced and the agonizing waiting lists shortened.

KISSED goodbye: Who stole the soul?

Rainier Spencer
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Like thieves in the night, radio station KISS (KISF103.5 FM) disappeared from the Las Vegas airwaves some weeks ago, leaving behind a devoted and confused audience. What happened? Word has it that the station was sold to the group that now broadcasts Spanish-language music from that spot on the FM dial. What is most bothersome about this turn of events, however is not that KISS is gone (although I am certainly irritated by the station's departure), but rather the ugly and unprofessional way KISS left town.

The station didn't seem to be losing money, and by all accounts it had a loyal and growing listenership. From dances, concerts, and contests to those "Got Soul?" billboards, KISS appeared to have found and catered to a segment of the valley's population that wanted to hear just the kind of music the station was playing. I can still hear the words "Classic Soul and Today's R&B" echoing in the air. I admit to being a fairly hard person to please, especially in regard to radio stations as I grew up listening to Frankie Crocker, Ken "Spider" Webb, Gary Byrd, and the other great DJs at WBLN and WWRL in New York City back in my day. I have been very disappointed by black radio stations in recent years, even in New York City and Atlanta, but KISS was pretty good in my book, and apparently a great many other listeners felt the same way.

So what was the problem? It seems that the owners of KISS simply decided to sell out without as much as letting their listeners know in advance. If you were lucky you heard the DJ's talking about it on the station's last day. If you didn't tune in until a few days later, though, you might have listened to a few Spanish songs before realizing that something was wrong. What was really wrong is that the owners of KISS simply had no respect or consideration for the loyal listeners who had made the station such a success. That's the real shame.

It would be bad enough if the story ended there, but it doesn't. It seems that shortly

after KISS disappeared, one of the DJs from KCEP (88.1 FM) said to the former KISS listeners who were now tuning in to his station, "Oh, y'all want to come back now?" Isn't that just like us, though? Rather than applauding a radio station that made a large segment of the Las Vegas Afro-American population happy, this DJ reserved his applause for when that station was taken away.

I didn't go back to KCEP. In fact I never left. This is because I only listen to KCEP on Thursdays, which was true even when KISS was on the air. On Thursdays, KCEP has possibly the best playlist on the planet, and I'm there. Someone will perhaps mention that there is or was a Sunday show on KCEP with similar programming, but I can take only so many minutes of the DJ claiming to have been personally present at every major event in black music history. But Thursdays are cool. However, the goodness of Thursdays merely serves to point out the unfortunate musical segregation of KCEP. Mature adults who don't care for barely disguised profanity, unimaginative lyrics, or crude songs in which it seems that the only verb used is "freak" are constantly disappointed from Friday through Wednesday, and are essentially being told to go elsewhere.

As much distaste as I have for that kind of music, though, I would nevertheless listen to it if it was integrated with the kind of material played on Thursdays. If it's all black music why not just mix it all together? Let's face it: jazz all day on only the first Wednesday of the month is as irritating and insulting as classic soul played only one hour a day during lunchtime. It's obvious that there is a large Afro-American population in the valley that enjoys listening to good old soul music. The success of KISS proved this without a doubt. Since KCEP is at least for now the black music leader in Las Vegas, the question is whether this station will finally integrate its listeners or continue to tell some of them that unless it's Thursday or lunchtime they need not apply.

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