

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Twenty-first birthday
reason to celebrate

Remember 21. That oh-so perfect age. It was far more imperial than 18, when you could only vote, sign up for the service and (in some states) down a brew. It was sweeter than 16. Back then, you were still finding your sea legs in this tempestuous ocean of a world. And 17, even though it's the name of a wildly popular girls teen magazine and the age at which mommy and daddy didn't have to chaperone you into an "adult" movie, couldn't hold a candle.

Ah, 21. The age of legality. You could visit an after-hours club (you get the drift), drink yourself dry, gamble, laugh in the face of driver's license-checking security at your favorite hot spot and do various other things.

As 21 is a milestone in life, so is it in the life of a newspaper, this newspaper especially. For 21 years, the Sentinel-Voice has worked to be the voice of African-Americans in Las Vegas. It has tried hard to tell the stories the mainstream media either misses or ignores. It has attempted to record our history in this city.

The Sentinel-Voice has experienced its share of growing pains. There were times the paper failed. There were times it got things wrong. There were times when its financial house wasn't in order. But like acne - most acne, that is - the scars lasted only a short while, erased by a thorough cleansing of the surface and a revitalization of the core.

There were also triumphs. The first edition is akin to a baby's first steps; the first profit to a child's first words; the five-year anniversary to the graduation to preschool; the 10-year-mark to establishing an identity as the city's news source for everything African-American; the 15-year-mark to a reassessment of purpose and the 20-year-anniversary to a settling in to that identity.

And the growth continues. As the digital age envelops the world, print media has had to reevaluate its role. Instead of dueling with cyberspace, many papers have jumped on the information superhighway. Who knows? Maybe the Sentinel-Voice will join the rest of the net surfers.

Then there's the challenge that weeklies face when competing against dailies. The Sentinel-Voice has met that challenge by consistently reporting on stories you will not see in other publications. We will continue doing that.

The Sentinel-Voice welcomes its 21st year with as much enthusiasm as it did its first. We think we're getting better with age. But of all the things 21 is, it isn't 25. Ah, 25. It marks the age at which you can rent a car. There's something square (in a good way) about the number. But, alas, it's only half of 50, which is only half of 100. Ah, 100. That's a number for you. Hey, when the Sentinel-Voice turns 100, make sure you get copies.



Wanted: Unbiased justice for juvenile offenders

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Civil rights leaders like Jesse Jackson, political officeholders, and many others throughout Black America have said for years that Jim Crow is alive and well in America's criminal justice system.

They've criticized the harsher sentences imposed on African-Americans arrested for possession of crack cocaine, compared with those imposed on whites arrested for possession of powdered cocaine. They've questioned the disproportionate number of African-Americans on the death rows of the nation's prisons.

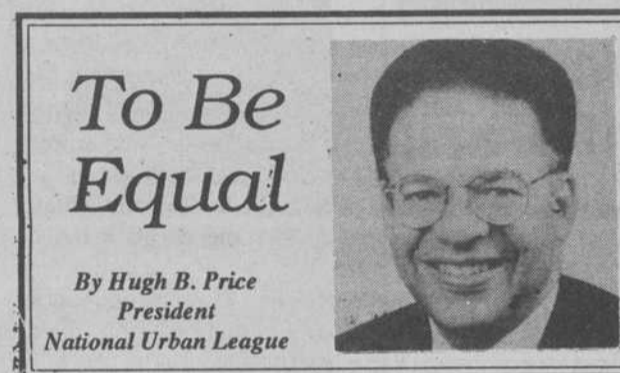
Now, a new study sponsored by the Department of Justice and six national foundations adds startling new information to the growing evidence that racism is endemic in the juvenile justice system as well.

The report, "And Justice for Some," shows that African- and Hispanic-American youth are treated more severely than white teens charged with comparable crimes at every step of the juvenile justice system.

The former are more likely than their white counterparts to be arrested, held in jail, sent to juvenile or adult court, convicted, and given longer prison terms.

Indeed, the report presents evidence of bias so blatant that it's mind-boggling.

For example, among teens who have not been sent to



prison before, blacks are more than six times as likely as whites to be sentenced by juvenile court judges to prison.

For those young people charged with a violent crime who have never been in juvenile prison, black teens are nine times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prison.

For those charged with drug offenses, black youths are forty-eight times more likely than whites to be sentenced to juvenile prison.

White youths charged with violent offenses are incarcerated on average for 193 days after trial. By contrast, black youth are incarcerated on an average 254 days; Hispanic youth, an average of 305 days.

Nationally, the report states, blacks under the age of 18 make up 15 percent of their age group, but 26 percent of those young people arrested, 31 percent of those sent to juvenile court, 44 percent of those detained in juvenile jails and 32 percent of those found guilty of being a delinquent.

Similarly, young blacks



account for 46 percent of all juveniles tried in adult criminal courts, 40 percent of those sent to juvenile prisons, and 58 percent of all juveniles confined in adult prisons.

These and other alarming statistics underscore that the nation is faced with an extraordinarily serious social and civil rights issue: We have a juvenile justice system that dispenses juvenile injustice.

"When you look at this data, it is undeniable that race is a factor," said Mark Soler, president of the Youth Law Center, a research and advocacy group in Washington. The Center led the coalition of civil rights

and youth advocacy organizations (including the National Urban League) which organized the research project.

Soler added that the biased, harsher treatment of teens of color who get in trouble with the law has a continuing devastating impact on their prospects for a decent life, making it harder and harder for those ensnared in its web to "go straight" — to "complete their education, get jobs and be good husbands and fathers."

In addition to the Justice department, support for the research effort came from the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Walter Johnson Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Center on Crime, Communities and Culture of George Soro's Open Society Institute.

The national study closely tracks the findings of another study, "The Color of Justice," (See Juvenile, Page 14)

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Telephone (702) 380-8100 • Fax (702) 380-8102

Contributing Writers:
Lee Brown
Tammy McMahan
Rainier Spencer
John T. Stephens III
Fred T. Snyder
Al Triche
Photographers:
John Broussard
Kimberly Edwards
Jonathan Olsen

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief
Lynnette Sawyer, General Manager
Dianna Saffold, Business Manager
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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