

## COMMENTARY

# Death and feelings

By Louie Overstreet  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

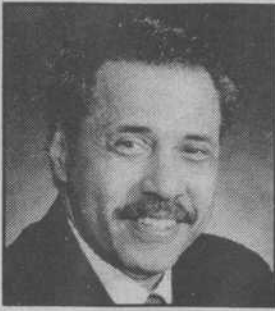
Given all the things that can cause loss of life, which ones move you to demonstrate a sense of caring, compassion, remorse, relief or exultation?

Do your feelings about death stem primarily from your religious beliefs, attitudes stemming from the value system of a democratic society, or emotions based on a conditioned response to how the demise of someone is portrayed by the media? Chances are your feelings stem from all three sources based on a given set of circumstances.

On the list of the top ten causes of death in the United States, what would be your guess as to which one, murder, or pneumonia- pronounced, "P-new-mo-ya" by my country friends living in Cleveland- causes more deaths? (I hear you saying to yourself, "Louie's friends have got to have some relatives living in Chicago, Detroit and Las Vegas.") What about the loss of life caused by AIDS, versus the number of people each year who commit suicide?

If you guessed that more people die from murder and AIDS than suicide and pneumonia, welcome to the universe of those who have become confused as a result of the daily brainwashing we receive from our nation's institutions of religion, government and media.

Pneumonia and influenza are number five on the list, just after the number four cause of death, lung cancer, and just before the number six cause of death in the United States, accidents.



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The number of persons committing suicide is number eight on the top ten list, just after the number seven cause of death, diabetes, and just before the number nine killer, kidney disease. In fact, eight of the ten causes of death are health related.

Here, I need to confess that the foregoing were trick questions: AIDS and murder are not even on the top ten list. I made the comparisons to illustrate the influence that the three dominant institutions in our society can have on what we feel, believe, support, and care about.

It seems that most circumstances and events occurring in the good old United States are described to us by our institutions in terms of them being sinful, criminal or un-American.

In light of the behavior of some religious leaders, it is laughable that they can preach to us, with a straight face, about how sinful conduct will keep us from going to heaven after we die. In the history of humankind, more persons have committed murder or suffered, in the name of religion, than for any other cause célèbre we can imagine in our brainwashed minds.

Presently, the aforementioned institutions are counting on the fact that we do not have an appreciation for history, thus, we will believe that Islam is a fanatical religion that is sinful, criminal and un-American. The reality is that in the Islamic faith, there are no more "evil doers" on a per capita basis than are found numbered

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# Racial roundups not new

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Civil libertarians hailed the recent decision by Portland police officials not to help the FBI indiscriminately grill Middle Eastern immigrants. Police officials in San Francisco and Minneapolis, though they did not flatly refuse to aid the FBI hunt, still expressed deep unease about the pending roundup.

There's a good reason they should.

The FBI has given no evidence that the more than 5,000 individuals they seek to question have any ties to the Sept. 11 terror attackers, have committed any crimes, or are in the country illegally. Attorney-General John Ashcroft has refused to give any assurance that the FBI's new round-up will bag more terrorists. Without that official assurance the at-random questioning of Muslim immigrants smacks of racial profiling.

The seed for the government ethnic targeting of Arab-Americans was planted in the 1960s. The ghetto riots that rocked hundreds of American cities triggered the first major escalation in police power. The 1968 Civil Rights Act gave police and federal agencies broader authority to

conduct surveillance and wiretaps against groups and individuals considered a threat to national security. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, with the full blessing of President Lyndon Johnson, escalated its illegal-and super-secret counter-intelligence program- popularly known as COINTELPRO, specifically designed to harass, intimidate and neutralize Black militant groups.

In the 1970s, Congressional investigators probing Hoover's spy program marveled at its scope. From 1964 to 1969, the FBI assembled a small army of more than 7,500 "ghetto informants" (known) and hundreds of FBI agents in a deadly national campaign to name names and compile dossiers on thousands of African-Americans it claimed were connected with the Black Muslims, Black Panthers, and civil rights leaders and activists.

The FBI listed the individuals targeted for questioning and surveillance under categories variously called, "Rabble Rouser Index," "Agitator Index" and the "Security Index."

Individuals wound up on the FBI's security watch list if they attended a political

meeting, donated a few dollars to a political group, or were rumored to be sympathetic toward political causes.

What made the Portland police's refusal to aid and abet in the FBI's current political hunt astounding, though, is that police officials have routinely cooperated in past FBI stop, search and question campaigns against those whom they tag as racial or political subversives. A provision in the 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act made it even easier for the FBI to rope local police departments in on its political hunts. Congress kicked out \$5 million to expand the police training programs at the FBI National Academy.

In 1969, the number of police in the program leaped from 200 to 2,000. In the decades since then, thousands of local and foreign police officials have received training in riot control, interrogation and intelligence gathering procedures of the FBI academy.

During those years police departments in Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, Detroit and New York either established, or expanded, their "red squads" in cooperation

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# Despite being tested, affirmative action still necessary

By Ron Walters  
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Well, we dodged a bullet.

It was widely felt by many observers in the Black leadership that during this Supreme Court term, affirmative action could well have seen its demise, since the high court had agreed to hear the long-running case, Adarand v. Pena. This case, a dispute originating in Colorado between Anglo and Hispanic firms over a contract to work on the federal highway system, featured a complaint by the Adarand constructors that it had been unlawfully excluded from the contracting process due to racial discrimination as perpetrated by the state's affirmative action program. Despite the fact that the court had ruled against Adarand in 1995, in the process it weakened the affirmative action law by deciding that the use of race must withstand "strict scrutiny." Nevertheless, Adarand continued to appeal the case, eventually reaching the Supreme Court.

However, in a surprising turn of events, the court dismissed the case, apparently because it had agreed to re-hear it on the basis of one set of arguments. But the lawyers for Adarand submitted a brief containing another set of arguments with issues that had not been heard by lower courts. So the Supreme Court unanimously dismissed it.

It should be noted that the Bush administration's solicitor general argued that the current interpretation of the law should be

upheld by the court, placing the administration against Adarand and-not coincidentally, I would argue-on the side of Pena. This move, undoubtedly was calculated to avoid any complications in the continued pursuit of the Hispanic vote by Bush. Nevertheless, he gets a plus from me for sticking with the current law and not trying to weaken it.

One bit of proof in the sea of evidence that affirmative action is still very much needed finds the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filing the largest suit in 20 years on discrimination in the construction industry. The culprit for this case is the Louisiana-based The Industrial Co. (TIC). A construction firm operating in seven states, it has been found to practice racial discrimination in hiring, since nearly 600 African-American workers were not given opportunities either to be employed or to move up in the firm.

The construction business in the state of Louisiana mirrors other states as a large volume business, generating nearly \$12 billion in revenue and involving 107,000 workers. But the lawyers from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund say the fact that the number of workers is lower than it should be is due to significant resistance to the entry of African-Americans by both unions and employers. (Ever wonder why, when you pass a construction site, there are so few brothers and sisters working?)

A second confirming fact for the effectiveness of affirmative action is found in a

recent study of New England colleges. The study, sponsored by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, showed that although some colleges were likely to admit proportionally more what they called "minorities" than similarly qualified Whites, they did not lower their standards to do so.

This finding debunks the widely held view by many Right wing opponents of affirmative action-that universities and colleges are systematically lowering their admissions standards as a part of their affirmative action programs in order to allow unqualified Blacks to enter.

The study did not promote the notion that all students had the same scores or qualifications, but it did find that universities in this region uniformly sought qualified students of all races, but admitted somewhat more students of color than White students. The strength of this record was buttressed by the finding that of the 221 colleges and universities surveyed, only seven had eliminated or limited their use of affirmative action in reaction to recent court decisions.

The most important inference that can be drawn from this study is this: If this is true in one region of the United States, why isn't it true overall?

In any case, since most of the elite colleges in the nation are located in this region, this finding gives great weight to the conclusion that Black students belong at the best institutions every bit as much as anyone else, and

affirmative action helps them to gain that access.

In this crisis atmosphere, fighting to keep affirmative action is one of the things that we must not let slide onto the backburner of the Black agenda, especially since evidence continues to appear that it is working. The Supreme Court will more than likely take up other cases on this subject.

A likely candidate is a case which finds the City of Yonkers, N.Y., fighting a court order instructing it to maintain racial balance in its public housing, because some Whites are unable to access it. So, there is reason for continued vigilance by lawmakers who need to "go back to the well" if a negative decision is rendered on any grounds, to try and find a new pretext to keep affirmative action viable.

I was recently in Brazil, where I made a report to Black organizations on the state of affirmative action in the U.S. I heard that because of the gravity of their exclusion, they were demanding quotas. I encouraged them to write race-specific language in the law, because that's why some Whites in this country can now claim that affirmative action "discriminates" against them and to go for the quotas. Why not?

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