

## OUR VIEW

## Gloves Are Off

Boxing needs a moratorium, a cooling-off period for the industry to assess what needs to be done to prevent death in the ring. Since 1994, six boxers have died as a result of injuries suffered in fights in Nevada. The latest casualty, Leavander Johnson, died five days after being severely injured in a Sept. 17 lightweight fight at the MGM Grand. Johnson is the second boxer fighter to die in Las Vegas in the last three months. On July 2, Martin Sanchez of Mexico City died as a result of injuries suffered in a bout the day before against Rustam Nugaev. Predictably, Johnson's death has trained the spotlight on a sport known as the "sweet science," a sport long criticized for ignoring pleas for additional safeguards.

Accordingly, the Nevada State Athletic Commission has convened a panel comprised of three former commission chairmen, a state assemblyman and a doctor to examine the issues of in-ring injuries and making boxing safer. The committee will review fight stoppages, explore using better equipment and consider new medical technologies. Findings are due April 1, 2006.

However necessary, the machinations that typically spring into place after disasters occur aren't sufficient. Boxing needs a moratorium, a 60- to 90-day window to do some serious soul searching.

Why?

Because much of what has been said about Johnson's death seems to miss the point—not totally absolving boxing but not really blaming it either. Here's this from respected boxing writer Michael Katz: "Dr. Tony Alamo, one of the five members of the Nevada State Athletic Commission, said he was 'agonizing' whether everything was done to help Johnson. He said Johnson, who took a beating in a previous title defense in 2003 against Javier Jauregui, came to Las Vegas with an MRI taken within the last year and had up-to-date CAT scans. Alamo found no fault in the stoppage by Referee Tony Weeks at 38 seconds of the 11th round, or in the fact that chief ring-side physician, Dr. Margaret Goodman, a neurologist known to be very quick to stop bouts, let the match continue after examining Johnson following the tenth round. Alamo said it seemed everything was done 'properly,' but said it was boxing."

In short, it was boxing that led to Johnson's death.

A moratorium won't bring him back, opponents might argue. True. Certainly no one knows if Johnson would still be here if he had on headgear, which is mandatory in the amateurs and used exclusively during professional training camps, but it's infinitely better to err on the side of caution. With a moratorium, the headgear issue could be studied. In addition, a moratorium would give fighters, fans and boxing brass time to muscle onto the congressional agenda the notion of creating a federal commission to oversee boxing. Such a commission could implement uniform standards across the country.

Ironically—and not because conservatives aren't fight fans—it's Daniel Flynn, the dictionary definition of a right-wing flamethrower, who actually lands the flushest punch about the Johnson tragedy: "Leavander Johnson was the IBF lightweight champion on Saturday. Today he is dead..."

"Johnson is the biggest name to die in the ring in my lifetime as a boxing fan," he continues. "...Twenty-three years ago, Duk Koo Kim died after suffering a 14th-round knockout at the hands of Ray Mancini. Like the Johnson-Chavez fight, the Kim-Mancini contest was for the lightweight championship. Although other big-name fighters have killed other boxers—fellow Boxing Hall-of-Famer Barry McGuigan killed an opponent earlier in 1982—Mancini is generally the fighter that casual fans associate with ring deaths. The fallout from Duk Koo Kim's death was enormous. Technical Knockouts (TKOs) come quicker, fight doctors are more apt to stop fights, pre- and post-fight medical evaluations are now quite rigorous, and, most importantly, Kim's death led directly to the abolition of the 15-round fight. What came as a blessing for fighters came as a curse for fight fans."

Boxing could use more blessings, as well as a moratorium to help it save lives and save itself.



## U.S. has own third world

By Dora LaGrande  
Sentinel-Voice

Decayed infrastructure, limited resources, disorganized governmental responses and apathy towards victims of Mother Nature. Sound familiar? Not in America, you say. It's time for America to recognize Third World conditions within its own borders. It's time for Blacks, as well, to see and respond to the reality.

America watched the Asian tsunami and thought it could never happen here. For years, we have seen the droughts and deplorable conditions in Africa and thought it could never happen here.

We have watched people perish in natural calamities throughout India and other parts of the world and thought those calamities could never happen here. Recently images from New Orleans prove that, yes, it can happen here.

As an American, I found it difficult over the years to understand natural calamities that caused thousands to perish so often in India and other places. It was inconceivable that the level of poverty and deprivation we would see coming across our TV screens could exist.

Documentaries depict the enormous gap between the haves and the have-nots, the lack of modern technology and infrastructure, the lack of social organization, and the absence of resources necessary to launch a rescue and recovery operation in some



## ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

of those foreign places. Ironically, America's response to the predicament and suffering of Katrina's victims has been reminiscent of that of a Third World country:

America has experienced first hand what can happen when the systems fail, the systems we thought were so infallible.

Much worse, we have now seen first hand what can happen to human beings when they are deprived of the very basic necessities of life; when they are driven to desperation; when they are left without help, to starve, succumb and die.

Because of Katrina, America's consciousness, hopefully, has been raised regarding our own Third World country.

We can no longer tout ourselves as being morally superior in imposing our high ideal of freedom and democracy in other parts of the world. We need to serve our own "have-nots" first — not only in the Katrina disaster but throughout America.

A Census Bureau report that came out the same day Katrina hit found that the number of poor Americans has significantly increased since 2000. New Orleans is not an aberration. Nationally, Blacks remain at the bottom

of the economic totem pole. They have the lowest median income of any group. In New Orleans, one in every three of New Orleans' 485,000 residents lives below the poverty level.

And, overall, a big portion of the nearly 40 million Americans who live below the poverty line hold low paying jobs receiving minimal benefits and very little job security, and the majority of that group is Black.

Hopefully, the good thing that died with New Orleans is the notion that Americans can continue to deal with urban problems such as poverty and joblessness through flight, isolation, empty slogans and rhetoric.

And nowhere was that fallacy more apparent than in the desperate faces of the

Black people who were holed up at the New Orleans Superdome.

They were trapped, and not just by flooded streets and an inept federal emergency bureaucracy, but by a prison of poverty that, for many, was virtually inescapable.

New Orleans is almost 70 percent Black, but nearly 30 percent of its people live below the poverty line.

Katrina has uncovered America's refusal to address poverty. And because it has been exposed in such a blatant, shocking way, I hope that this tragedy shocks us all into realizing that something bigger than a city died.

Actual lives were lost in this tragedy, and this may very well put a dent in the out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality that exists when it comes to facing the problems of poor, urban Blacks.

Blacks have always been reduced to a blip on the screen and in the minds of millions of people, mostly (See LaGrande, Page 11)

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