

# AIDS fades from White to Black America

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When a strange disease, later known as AIDS, was first detected at UCLA 25 years ago, it was difficult to get African-Americans interested in what was largely dismissed as a "White gay disease." Today, however, AIDS is increasingly considered largely a "Black disease" that afflicts gays and straights, males and females.

"Today, more than half of all people living with HIV/AIDS and newly-infected with HIV each year in the United States are Black," Phill Wilson, executive director of the Black AIDS Institute, said at a news conference here Monday.

"Among women, Blacks account for two-thirds of all new infections. And recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studies estimate nearly half of all Black gay and bisexual men in some of America's urban centers are already infected. These facts represent an unprecedented crisis for Black America."

Wilson and Perness Seele, founder of the Balm in Gilead and a major organizer of Black church efforts in the U.S. and Africa, have had a major impact on helping African-Americans realize that HIV and AIDS are ravaging Blacks in the U.S. and around the world, especially in Africa.

The heightened awareness was evident at the news conference called by Wilson. Among those present to lend support were

actor Danny Glover; U.S. Representatives Charles Rangel and Donna M. Christenson; NAACP President Bruce Gordon; Reverends Gregory Smith of Mother AME Zion Church and Edwin Sanders of Metropolitan Interdenominational Church; National Urban League Senior Vice President for Programs Donald Bowen; Rachel Guglielmo of the Open Society Institute, and news media representatives from the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), American Urban Radio Networks and Black Entertainment Television.

All have signed on to Phill Wilson's call to "win" the AIDS fight over the next five years. His organization issued a new report titled, "AIDS in Black Face: 25 Years of an Epidemic."

Wilson said the report, which chronicles Black America's AIDS epidemic, "make it clear that a quarter century into America's saga with AIDS, the epidemic is more Black than ever."

The 25 years of AIDS is not an anniversary one likes to celebrate. And it's important to not to get caught up in the past, Wilson says.

"While this reports looks back at the first 25 years of the AIDS epidemic, it's not a report about our yesterdays," he said. "It is a



GEORGE E. CURRY

proclamation about our tomorrows with recommendations for individuals, communities and elected officials on how to end the AIDS epidemic in Black America."

One can no longer dismiss AIDS as a "White disease." Some of the most notable deaths of African-Americans include tennis great Arthur Ashe, journalist Max Robinson, Rev. James Cleveland, dance choreographer Alvin Ailey and rapper Eric "Easy E" Wright.

The "AIDS in Blackface" report observes: "The epidemic's frontline is quickly shifting from larger, northern cities to the more dispersed communities of the South. Today, seven of the 10 states with the highest per capita AIDS rates are in the South, and 41 percent of people living with HIV are in the Southeast. It is particularly a Black epidemic. Eight of the 10 Blackest state epidemics are in the South."

A chart in the report breaks it down on a state-by-state basis. For example, African-Americans are 26 percent of the population in Alabama, but 63 percent of the AIDS cases; in Georgia, Blacks represent 70 percent of all AIDS cases while constituting 29 percent of the population; Mississippi is 37 percent Black but African-Americans are 73 percent of the AIDS cases; the Tennessee Black popu-

lation is 16 percent, with African-Americans accounting for just more than half — 52 percent — of those with AIDS; Blacks represent 11 percent of the Texas population and 35 percent of the AIDS cases there, and Virginia, with a 19 percent Black population, has a 59 percent share.

Blacks also represent more than half of all AIDS cases in Delaware (68 percent), the District of Columbia (82 percent), Illinois (52 percent), Louisiana (66 percent), Maryland (80 percent); Michigan (58 percent), New Jersey (55 percent), North Carolina (69 percent), Pennsylvania (53 percent) and South Carolina (73 percent).

Recommendations include:

— Rejecting the idea that HIV and AIDS is inevitable

— Demanding that proven weapons, such as needle exchanges and arming youth with more than abstinence only information be expanded

— Expanding access to treatment

— Ending the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS

The report stated, "In the final analysis, this epidemic isn't terribly complicated: When we allow politics, subjective notions of morality and profit-driven health economics to reign over public health, the most vulnerable in our society are left for HIV to prey upon."

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.

# Israel's wall of death angers Palestinians

By Bill Fletcher Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Some call it the "Apartheid Wall," reminding us of the criminal regime that dominated South Africa until 1994 and oppressed its Black majority. I simply call it the Wall of Death because, for all the rhetoric, Israel's wall separating itself from the Occupied Territories more than anything else is about ensuring the death of the Palestinian people.

When the idea of Israel creating a wall separating itself from the Occupied Territories was first broached, most people viewed it as a crackpot notion that would never come to fruition. Yet, in an atmosphere in which Israel has continued to violate United Nations' resolutions calling for its withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and when it lives in fear of terror attacks by individuals and organizations from within the Palestinian resistance, the idea of a wall gained steam.

It needs to be clear that this wall is opposed by virtually every country on planet earth. It is a unilateral declaration of the bor-

ders that Israel wishes to establish — for now. Thus, the illegal settlements created by Israel in the Occupied Territories, will become, for the most part, a permanent feature, and the Palestinian territories will look more and more like a collection of chicken pox on someone's back rather than anything approaching a nation-state.

In this context, it was astounding for President Bush to once again step forward and put his foot in his mouth, virtually endorsing the unilateralism of the Israeli government. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert has insisted that if there is no agreement with the Palestinians on borders, then Israel will declare the borders on their own! Yet, such a declaration will be a flagrant violation of United Nations' resolutions. When it has come to violating United Nations' resolutions, other countries have been threatened with sanctions and/or



BILL FLETCHER, JR.

military operations. Why is Israel exempt from this and not even subject to criticism by the Bush administration?

The Israeli Wall of Death is not aimed at simply segregating the Palestinians on a non-viable piece of territory after the Israelis have gobbled up the most useful land and seized East Jerusalem. This is where the analogy with South

African apartheid ends. It is not a stretch to conclude that the aim of the Israeli government is to drive the Palestinians off the Occupied Territories entirely and make way for their vision of a Greater Israel.

The Israeli government knows full well that the borders that it is preparing to declare will make an independent Palestinian state virtually impossible. It will be the equivalent of the United States Native American reservations, which are barely able to sustain themselves. The reservations for the Pales-

tinians will be a temporary space until they are forced onto their own 21st century version of the trail of tears.

The time has come to stop making special exceptions for Israel. The fact that Jews were nearly exterminated by the Nazis in the Holocaust can simply not be used as a reason to turn a blind eye toward the efforts by the Israeli government to ethnically cleanse Palestine of the Palestinian people. Israel's Wall of Death; its repeated failure to heed United Nations' resolutions; and its accumulation of nuclear weaponry (along with a failure to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) demonstrate nothing approaching any sort of democratic morality. Rather it represents what will ultimately be a self-destructive, and potentially catastrophic, road by those who have decided that might makes right and that it's their way or no way at all — legalities and morality notwithstanding.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a labor activist and immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum.

## LaGrande

(Continued from Page 8)

Certainly it's not the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who is still trying to "keep hope alive" while a great number of our young people educationally, morally and spiritually are going to hell in a hand basket and who has had scandals of his own to deal with.

It's not the Reverend Al Sharpton, who is full of more rhetoric than he is action and who said during the Democratic National Convention that we would ride this donkey as far as it takes us (for whatever that was worth). He failed to acknowledge that neither political party is working toward Black economic empowerment.

It's not Minister Louis Farrakhan, who

successfully organized the Million Man March, collected thousands and thousands of dollars, and mobilized a million people, yet no one — not even some of his own people — reaped the full benefits from it.

It's not Mark Morial, the Urban League national president, who put out a position statement on Immigration Reform for illegal aliens that supported reform in a way that threaten to decimate the Black community.

So, where will our credible, honest leader come from? At this stage of the game, I guess we just need to pray that the Lord sends a prodigal son or daughter and that he sends one soon.

If we expect our leaders to champion our

causes and confront institutional powers, we must first elect people who are qualified, unbought, not for sale, and not afraid of White folks. We must also stop accepting without question whatever our elected officials tell us or whatever they do.

Accountability is the word. Time out for supporting people when they are wrong. What kind of message is this sending to our young people? We're subconsciously saying to them that it doesn't matter if you're a thief, a sexual predator or a drug addict, as long as you're a brother or sister you're okay and we'll support you in your indiscretions. I think not. No wonder the majority of them don't want to take responsibility for anything

that they do. They're emulating us, and it's called lead by example.

There is no way that we can explain to our young African-American people or to the general public why members of the electorate who are Black are exempt from the law on criminal matters, nor should we have to. We must understand that the worst type of exploitation by Black elected officials happens when they exploit Black people and take advantage of the system. A system that so many people gave their lives for in order for them to be a part of it.

And the bottom line is this: If the elected officials don't commit the crimes, they won't have to worry about doing the time.